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THE GATES  
OF  
THE SANCTUARY  
OR  
THE POSTULANT AND THE NOVICE

TAKEN FROM THE LATIN WORKS OF  
DOM RUPERT PRESINGER, O.S.B.

BY THE  
VERY REV. FRANCIS CUTHBERT DOYLE, O.S.B.

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LIFE OF  
DOM RUPERT PRESINGER, O.S.B.

PRIOR OF ST. PETER'S ABBEY, SALZBURG

ON the thirtieth day of December, in the year 1688, Rupert Presinger, the devout author from whose works the following pages have been taken, was born at Ausee, in the Diocese of Passavia in Upper Styria. At the usual age at which boys are sent to school, he was intrusted by his pious parents to the care of the Benedictine Monks of St. Lambert's Abbey which was then, and which still continues to be, one of the greatest glories of his native province. This centre of Benedictine influence owes its origin to the Duke of Carinthia, a certain Marquardus who, in the very year in which the Norman Conqueror first set foot on our shores, established it to be the home of holy Religious, who should continually pray for his well-being both temporal and eternal. These unwearied workers speedily built it up into a spiritual stronghold, whence the good odour of Christ was diffused abroad through all the surrounding peoples. By their gentleness, their sanctity, and their blameless lives, the Monks gradually led these peoples into a willing subjection to His light and easy yoke. They themselves rapidly increased and multiplied. Consequently, they were forced so to extend their borders, that at last their Abbey became one of the grandest and noblest monuments of mediæval Christianity. After encountering well-nigh every vicissitude of fortune, and stoutly resisting the shocks and storms which have laid prostrate and swept away thrones and dynasties seemingly destined to last for ever, it stands erect even in these our days, hoary with the snows of eight

hundred winters, yet gifted with a vigorous youthfulness which reminds us of the undecaying vitality of the Church of God.

To this venerable sanctuary of religion and of polite learning, the youthful Presinger brought from his holy home a character admirably adapted to receive the impress of a divine vocation. He was solidly pious, deeply imbued with sentiments of lively faith, trained to labour, and accustomed to act on the idea of duty. He possessed, moreover, intellectual ability of no mean order and even in his early years gave promise of that excellence which he afterwards attained, when deep study, under the guidance of thoroughly competent masters, had imparted to his intelligence that keenness of edge and that brilliancy of polish, which only the friction of mind upon mind is able to produce. Dowered with qualities such as these, it is needless to say that, from the exceptionally favourable circumstances in which his lot was cast, and from the able tuition of the distinguished masters under whose influence he was brought, Presinger derived all the spiritual as well as all the intellectual advantages that these circumstances were able to ensure, and that these masters could put within his reach. After passing with great credit through the various grades which complete the circle of collegiate learning, he ended his school-boy life at St. Lambert's, carrying away with him the repute of being a scholar of great promise, and a youth of conduct so exemplary that he was held up to future generations of students as a model on which to fashion their lives and manners.

As he left the shelter of his beloved *Alma Mater* and faced the great world which lay beyond its walls, two widely divergent paths presented themselves to his mental vision, and a voice made itself heard within his heart, asking a question oftentimes before debated there, but now calling for an immediate and decisive answer. On which of these two ways should he choose to walk for the remainder of his life-pilgrimage? Should he choose the one leading through the Cloister to eternal rest, or the other on which he must



of necessity pass through the storms and the battles of the world, to death, the grave, and perhaps a doubtful eternity?

In the case of one nurtured as he had been in this sanctuary of monastic virtue, it was not difficult to divine upon which of the paths he would definitively set his feet. For, during the most impressionable years of his existence, he had been under the influence of the children of St. Benedict. In the noble Church of their Abbey, he had day by day listened with reverential awe to the solemn chant of the Divine Office. In the lecture-room, he had been brought into personal contact with them. He had felt the irresistible charm of their modesty, their patience, their unwearied assiduity. In the playground he was attracted to them. He fell beneath the spell of their unaffected, easy, fatherly mode of converse. Also, he had not failed to mark their laborious, unselfish lives; their mutual charity; their simplicity of aim; their manliness; their devotedness. The combination of all these determining influences acted on the germ of that divine vocation already planted in his heart by God, as the genial warmth of the sun acts on the seed that is buried in the earth. That combination awoke into activity the life-principle slumbering within that germ. It enabled the germ to put forth its strength, and to burst through the doubts, the hesitations, and the uncertainties which for years had enveloped it. It drew it forth into the bright daylight and caused it to blossom into the sure, unwavering, fixed resolve to leave all things, in order to tread in the footsteps of Christ. He had then just attained his eighteenth year. He was in the full bloom of early youth. His heart was pure and unsullied; it had never tasted of the world's pleasures; it was unversed in any of the world's wickedness, or wiles, or intrigues. There was, therefore, no obstacle in the way to hinder him from promptly obeying the call of God. The shadow of the great Master had fallen on him; Christ's persuasive voice had said: "Follow Me," and forthwith he left all things, and threw in his lot with those who were treading in the paths of perfection.

But it was not at St. Lambert's, the home of his youth, that he accomplished the desire of his heart and entered the ranks of the monastic army. For some reason which is not explained St. Peter's at Salzburg was chosen to be the field of his spiritual warfare.\* Thither he directed his steps; and there, on the 4th of November, 1706, after the usual preliminary probation, and the devout exercises of the retreat, he was clothed with the holy habit.

This famous Abbey, which even at the present day exists in well-nigh all its ancient splendour, is so celebrated, and, at the same time, is so intimately connected with the brief history of Dom Presinger, that we may be pardoned for pausing for a moment to give it a passing notice.

It was founded in the year 581, by St. Rupert, Apostle of the Bavarian Nation. From that date until the invasion of the Carantanian Slavs, towards the end of the sixth century, it increased and prospered, and year by year widened the circle of its beneficent influence upon the surrounding population. But the advent of these barbarous tribes put as effectual a stop to the progress of its civilising power, as the biting east wind puts to the growth of the sprouting corn. Their presence banished good-fortune from the Cloisters of the Monks. Discipline lost its nerve and relaxed its hold. Learning fled from the schools. All things fell into a state of apparent collapse and remained in this pitiable condition till the year 739. Then St. Boniface arrived, and, with the zeal of an Apostle and the untiring energy of his race, threw himself heart and soul into the difficult task of once again making the vineyard of the Lord burst forth into the bloom and the fruitfulness of a very paradise of God. Under his able administration, the work of repair, of reconstruction, of uprooting, and of planting, went on with an earnestness and a thoroughness that speedily changed the whole aspect of affairs. Discipline once again recovered its constraining power; learning re-

\* I take this opportunity of acknowledging my debt of gratitude to the Monks of this noble Abbey for their kindness and courtesy in furnishing me with all the details of Dom Presinger's life.

turned to the halls whence it had fled ; piety, virtue, religion, found their wonted shelter in the hallowed Cloisters which the Monks had built to be a refuge from the storms and the troubles of the world. St. Benedict's Rule was introduced into the Community to be its guide in the narrow way, and to replace one which has so utterly perished as to leave behind not a trace of its existence.

The life of the monastic tree had not quite died out. Though its huge arms had been snapped off and its green foliage torn away by the violence of the tempest, there was a vivifying principle still left in the parent stock. Under the fostering care of St. Boniface, that parent stock once again put forth its boughs and branches ; it covered itself with green foliage ; as of yore, men came to shelter under its refreshing shade, and brought with them whatever of moral worth or of intellectual power there was left in the land. For the three succeeding centuries, the Monastery continued to be the nursing mother of profound scholars, of saintly men, of all that was noble, and great, and virtuous. But, in the tenth century, another storm burst upon it, when the Hungarians, like a devastating whirlwind, swept down upon all that region over which St. Peter's exercised its beneficent sway. Once again there was destruction, desolation, almost total ruin. Yet, in spite of calamities that seemed to be overwhelming, the vital principle of the monastic tree was never quite extinguished. Whenever there was a lull in the storm and the air was cleared of political or of social disturbances, that vital principle once again diffused its power and its energy throughout the apparently decaying trunk and branches. Through an ever-varying fortune, the Abbey bravely struggled on, sheltering the light of science in its cloisters and keeping the lamp of faith ever brightly burning in its hallowed shrines. Thanks to the loving kindness of God, it has withstood the storms of more than a thousand years. It yet remains powerful, erect, flourishing in this our twentieth century, a marvel of greatness and of magnificence, recalling to the wondering eyes of the travelling Englishman a vivid picture of the glories of which



our own country once could boast in the departed ages of faith.

It was, then, in the gray old cloisters of this historic Abbey, round which there clustered so many thrilling memories of the past, that Presinger entered on the duties of the Religious Life. He was young and inexperienced, but he came to God as a child, with a child's simplicity, a child's humility. These virtues, crowning his purity of heart, made him a Novice such as it is a joy unto Religious men to welcome into their midst. There were stamped on his character those marks which make us exclaim as soon as we perceive them: "The finger of God is here." He was eager for the "Work of God," both in its liturgical signification and in that wider sense in which it includes everything that, in any way whatever, has any connection with the divine service. He was prompt in obedience, and in this respect he showed that truly religious spirit which, while it nerved him courageously to perform acts that cost him many a pang and entailed much self-effacement, did not suffer him to set aside, or to treat with contempt or with indifference, even the most insignificant rule, simply because it seemed to be of little account. He bravely encountered humiliation, and he never turned aside from anything that brought him in contact with this keen instrument of Christian perfection. When, in order to test of what metal he was made, his Superiors reviled him, he held his peace; when they derided him, he accepted their derision as his due; when they employed him in lowly offices, he manifested a joy which was evidently unfeigned. Consequently, when his year of probation came to a close, and the question of his profession was debated at the Monastic Council board, there was no hesitation about the admission of one so well disposed and so manifestly called by the voice of God, to walk in the path of Holy Religion. Only one week was suffered to elapse between the day which completed his year of Novitiate and the day—to him for ever afterwards holy and memorable—when, in the presence of his Abbot and of the wide circle of his



Brethren, he irrevocably bound himself to the service of God. This eventful day in his life was the 11th of November, 1707.

Passing from the Novitiate and from the study of asceticism, the daily practice of which had moulded him into a spiritual athlete, Presinger entered on a new phase in his monastic life. He began that course of higher study which was to prepare him for the exalted office of the priesthood, and, at the same time, to endow him with that intellectual culture which the Benedictine Order has ever held in high esteem. For the acquisition of this culture there were at Salzburg exceptionally great facilities which but very few other monastic houses could command. These facilities were put within his reach by the existence there of a flourishing University which owed its foundation to the zeal and the energy of Abbot Joachim who, in 1617, with the authorisation of the Archbishop and the substantial aid of Abbot Gregory, inaugurated its career of usefulness. So eager was this enterprising Abbot to open these fountains of learning, that he would not wait till there had been erected suitable buildings in which to deliver the lectures. While these buildings were in course of construction, he threw open the cloisters of his Abbey and had the professors there, dispensing their treasures of erudition to crowds of eager and inquisitive students. For more than two hundred years the light of secular as well as of theological science poured forth its brilliant rays from this centre of Benedictine learning, a light that only in the first decade of the nineteenth century was finally extinguished by the stifling jealousy of a hostile Government. Presinger applied himself with all the energy of his character to the prosecution of his studies, and availed himself to the full of the advantages offered to him by distinguished teachers and by contact with minds as eager and as enthusiastic in the pursuit of knowledge as was his own. During his University career he was raised to the priesthood. In the following year, 1711, he presented himself before the examining board to defend a number of difficult theological theses. This test of scholarship he underwent

with great credit and won from the Faculty the much-coveted honour of the Doctor's degree.

Though indefatigable in the pursuit of knowledge, and particularly in the pursuit of that professional knowledge which it is indispensable for a priest to acquire, he never for a moment laid aside the study of that true wisdom, without which the most profound erudition profiteth nothing. Therefore, he made it his chief aim in life to become a perfect Religious. Everything else was thrust by him into a position subordinate to that one absorbing pursuit. In his eyes, to know, without at the same time reducing to practice that which he knew, appeared to be the height of folly. Hence he strove daily to walk towards God, by those paths which most directly lead men to Him. He eagerly did "God's Work." He humbly submitted his neck to the yoke of obedience. He shrank not from humiliation, or from the pain which it inflicts. In this, as in every other work that he undertook, he was thoroughly in earnest; and his earnestness, with the co-operation of divine grace, made him that which he aimed at being—a true Monk, a true Religious. A proof of the high esteem in which he was held by his Superiors, is the fact that, at the early age of five-and-twenty, he was intrusted with the important task of training the Novices in the paths of perfection. The Superiors knew full well that, though young in point of years, he was mature in character; for, already even in his early manhood, he showed that gravity, that discretion, and that prudence, which only length of days and a wide experience in the ways of the world are able to impart to most other men.

To the important office confided to his care, he brought not only a mind richly stored with theological lore, but a heart well disciplined by all the austere practices of an ascetical life. He himself had borne the yoke which he was to impose on others, and had trodden the paths through which he had to lead them to perfection. There was, moreover, about him a sweetness of manner, a kindly, courteous mode of address, a sympathetic, winning tone of voice, which drew to him the confidence and the love of those who came to seek a home



in the Cloister. These qualities gave to him that golden key by which he was able to penetrate into the most secret chamber of their hearts; thence to cast forth the hidden causes of unrest; the evil habits contracted before their abandonment of the world; and the various other obstacles which stand in the way of divine grace. The young Novices speedily discovered that they were in the hands of a Master who not only was well qualified to teach them all the mysteries of the spiritual life, but who set them an example which compelled them to put in practice the precepts which he taught. For the space of nine years he held, with great credit to himself and with great profit to the Community, this arduous and most important post. A new sphere of usefulness was then thrown open to him, by his election to the office of Cloistral Prior. In this capacity, he had to take the Abbot's place and to act with his authority, whenever the latter was absent from the Monastery. As in the office of Novice-Master, so also in that of Cloistral Prior, he was ever careful to carry into effect one of his fundamental principles: he himself first did that which he expected his subjects to do. He aimed at being that which *Prior* signifies—the *first* in every religious practice, virtue, and duty. Of duty, he made himself the loyal servant, and faithfully yielded obedience to the multitudinous calls which that uncompromising taskmaster exacted from him. It was remarked by those who were under his authority, that few were so observant of silence, few so punctual at the calls of obedience, few so indefatigable in mental toil, as was the humble, gentle, devout Prior whose whole life was to them a daily and hourly admonition “to go and do in like manner.”

As the Abbot's substitute, he was frequently called upon to adjudicate in the contentions and the disputes which arose between Monk and Monk, and also in those which but too often broke out among the numerous dependents of so great an Abbey. Many opportunities were, consequently, afforded him of exercising and of manifesting his patience, his prudence, and his powers of discrimination. Those who, in

these critical junctures, were forced to appeal to him, were loud in their praise of his rigorous impartiality. Calmly and silently he listened to each of the contending parties, till they had nothing more to say in accusation or in defence. Then, in a few brief words, he summed up the case for each side and delivered his sentence with so much gentleness, that even the vanquished retired without any feelings of resentment against him, or any suspicion of bias, or of unfairness in his judgment. His charming frankness of manner, his plain, straightforward way of dealing with everybody, made it impossible for them to do otherwise. He disarmed hostile criticism; he appeased every angry feeling; he subdued hearts; for, he had that most potent of charms, the power to rule souls: "*Ars artium, regimen animarum.*"

During the years when he held the post of Novice-Master, and also during the term of his Priorship which lasted till his death, he employed whatever leisure he could snatch from his many duties, in writing spiritual treatises for the use of those who were under his care. In order to prepare for the Religious Life those who were still living in the world, he wrote the treatise on the *Postulant*. To help those who came to the Cloister worthily to prepare themselves for the reception of the holy habit, he next wrote his *Retreat*. Then came the admirable little work on the *Novice*. These three, united under the title *At the Gates of the Sanctuary*, are now, as we believe, for the first time published in English. For the guidance of those who after him might be intrusted with the training of Novices, he wrote a short work entitled, *The Novice-Master*. Besides these works, he drew up *A Guide for Benedictine Priests*; and, in order to prepare himself for death, composed two short tracts which he called respectively, *The Benedictine who Daily keeps Death before his Eyes*, and *The Benedictine Sick and Dying*. For a considerable time before his holy death he carried in his own bosom a perpetual *memento mori* in the pulmonary complaint which eventually opened for him the gates of Paradise.

In the beginning of the year 1741, it was evident to all



that the end was not now far off, and that the dread messenger had already laid his hand upon him, to call him away. He himself knew this perfectly well. He did not shrink from Death's icy touch, or tremble at his summons. For years he had familiarised himself with the contemplation of that grim countenance, and now that it had come so nigh to him, he did not recoil from it as from the face of an enemy; he rather smiled a welcome to it as to that of a friend who had come to conduct him to the bosom of Jesus Christ. By reason of his great weakness, he had for some time retired to the monastic infirmary. There he calmly and cheerfully awaited the end which came at last on the fifteenth day of January. On account of the great difficulty which he experienced in breathing, the dying Religious sat in his chair, facing the altar, with his eyes intently fixed on the tabernacle. He had that day received all those sacred rites which prepare the soul for its passage into eternity. He was in the full possession of his faculties. His lips moved incessantly in humble prayer, and joined in the fervent acts which his attendants from time to time suggested to him. Thus the day wore on. Night closed in and hour succeeded hour, till it was now close upon midnight. Presently the great bell of the Abbey began to toll for the *Matin Office*. Already the Brethren were assembling in Choir to sing the praises of God, when the attendants perceived that the last moment had arrived. The Community were, therefore, hurriedly called from the church to the infirmary, and tearfully gathered round their beloved Prior. While they were supplicating for him the divine mercy, while their plaintive voices were still sounding in his ear, while the words of prayer were still trembling on his own lips,—his spirit gently passed away into the bosom of God.

A truly beautiful death, following on a holy and beautiful life! A life of complete submission to rule minutely obeyed, because it indicated to him the will of God; a life of charity, filled with good works; a life of unselfishness, of purity, of lowly humility; a life, in one word, modelled on that of Christ.

May the study of his works, which were not written exclusively for his own Order, but for Religious of all other Institutes and for those who are aspiring to minister at the Holy Altar, encourage many to tread in his footsteps and to copy his virtues, that, by imitating his holy life, they may deserve to close their days in that peaceful, childlike trust in God which robs Death of all his terrors, and makes of him but the doorkeeper of our Father's house.

F. C. DOYLE, O.S.B.

# AT THE GATES OF THE SANCTUARY

## FIRST PART THE POSTULANT

### CHAPTER I

#### GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR MAKING CHOICE OF A STATE OF LIFE

THE choice of a State of Life is a matter of very great importance, because on that choice, in great measure, will depend your joy of heart, peace of conscience, progress in spiritual things, perseverance in the path of virtue, and, in one word, your happiness both in this world and in the world to come. If your choice should happen to be a mistaken one, it will cloud your life with sorrow, will fill it with troubles, will lead you into endless faults and errors and will expose you to the danger of eternal damnation. Hence St. Gregory Nazianzen could say with truth: "This choice is a matter of so great moment, that it is the cause of a religiously ordered life which leads to eternal happiness, or of a badly regulated one which conducts to eternal misery."\*

Only the choice that is made in obedience to the divine call can be said to be good: "Every plant which My heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up."† These words are literally true. Therefore, in this matter of the choice of a State of Life, pay special attention to the

\* *Oratio*, 23.

† *St. Matth.* xv. 13.

divine call and manfully carry into effect that which it counsels you to do ; for, unless you act in this way, you are deliberately exposing yourself to the danger of hell fire. For, if many of those who were and who are undoubtedly called by God, have perished, and if they do actually perish, what will be the fate of those who choose a State of Life without troubling themselves to inquire whether God has called them to it ? Do not stifle any conscientious qualms concerning this matter, with the thought that there have been some persons who, without Our Lord's invitation, have chosen a State of Life, and who yet have been mercifully assisted by Our good God, when they repented of their evil, ill-advised proceeding. This is an extraordinary grace, and therefore it cannot, without rashness, be brought forward as an inducement for others to act in a similar way ; because the number of those who have been lost by so doing far exceeds the number of those who have been mercifully spared and saved. Beware, then, of trusting your eternal happiness to an issue so uncertain. God, it is true, is exceedingly merciful ; and, to hinder those who have made an erroneous choice in their selection of a State of Life from being swallowed in the abyss of despair when they discover their mistake and repent of it, does oftentimes give some such signal proofs of His infinite loving kindness and mercy ; but He by no means wishes thereby to encourage the presumptuous daring of those who, in the hope of afterwards rectifying their error, follow their own whim in choosing a State of Life without paying any attention whatever to the call of God.

This divine call is, in various ways, made known to men. To some of them it is manifested by revelation, to others by the command of a Superior ; for one man the choice is made by others, for another it is pointed out by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost ; prudent deliberation with their own hearts discloses it to some persons, while to others it is discovered through the counsel of men wise and experienced in the ways of God.

The manifestation of God's calling, by means of a direct



revelation, is extraordinary and of rare occurrence. Therefore, it is neither to be looked for nor to be desired; for, it would be rash to seek or to pray for prodigies of this kind.

Also, it is very seldom that the choice of a State of Life is made at the command of a Superior; for, each is free to choose the State of matrimony, or of continency, or of religion. Moreover, it is the common and certain teaching of Theologians, that those persons who have attained the age of puberty may choose whatever State of Life shall seem good to them; and, if there is question of the Religious State, they are not bound to ask even their parents' consent, still less to wait for their order to embrace it. In only one case are they called on to tarry for the parental assent, and that is, when either father or mother depends on them for the necessaries of life.

States of Life which are determined for us by the election of others are all those offices, the appointment to which emanates from the will and the votes of others. In this case also, prudent consultation with the wise and experienced is not to be set aside, because it is one of the ordinary means for ascertaining the will of God.

Persons are *inspired* to choose a State of Life when it is made manifest to their intelligence, by means of internal illumination, that a certain State is very expedient for them, and when their will is moved, in an efficacious manner, to choose that State. This method is not the usual one which is employed by God, but it is sometimes made use of by Him, chiefly for the purpose of moving men to embrace either the Religious State or the State of Continency, and to undertake lowly and laborious offices.\* Hence, it is evident that, out of these six ways for making known the divine will to men, with respect to their calling, there are only two that are general or universal. These are: prudent consultation with one's own heart and with those who are wise and experienced.

In order successfully and profitably to take counsel with

\* *De Ponte de Christ. Homin. perfect.*, tom. ii., tr. i., cap. 6.

one's own heart, certain conditions are requisite, some of which must precede and others must follow this consultation. Those which must precede are, first, purity of heart, arising from a real horror of sin, from a careful avoiding of every transgression, and particularly of every transgression that is of a grievous nature; for, "wisdom will not enter a malicious soul, or dwell in a body subject to sins."\* In the next place, all passions must, as far as possible, be quelled, all unruly affections be reduced to order, all clinging to earthly things be cut loose from the soul. Of this the reason is not far to seek; for, these passions, affections, and adhesion to earthly things hinder it from acquiring purity of heart, and, by preventing the acquisition of that, deprive it of the light which is necessary for seeing and for recognising that for which God is asking, since only of the pure of heart is it said: "Blessed are the clean of heart, for, they shall see God."† Besides being pure, the soul must be in a state of indifference; it must be as a clean sheet of canvas, or of parchment, on which God may in such a way write His good pleasure as that His will may without difficulty be read. They who have not this quality of indifference, who cleave with tenacity of purpose to a particular position, or to an office, are as parchment which has already been covered with other characters, and which, therefore, is unsuitable for presenting to the eyes of a reader any information that the author may desire to write on it. Hence, in the opinion of ascetical writers, they have not the requisite qualifications for this important deliberation. There must be joined with this indifference respecting any State or any office, prayer which is humble, earnest, and full of faith; prayer which acknowledges the weakness of human reason, and hopes that the Lord Who abundantly giveth wisdom, will, without stint, bestow it on those who confidently ask for it.

Prayer to God should be accompanied by fervent petitions to the Saints and to the immaculate Virgin, by a devout reception of the Sacraments, and by other good works undertaken for the success of the object which we have in

\* *Wisd.* i. 4.

† *St. Matth.* v. 8.

view. Another very powerful help is meditation on the eternal truths; for, as this act of deliberating about the choice of a State of Life is a very spiritual matter, needing much heavenly wisdom to carry that deliberation to a successful issue, it is only becoming that, before beginning it, the mind, by means of careful thought, should be imbued with those thrilling verities, by means of which it is sure to be safely guided in its secret consultations. Chief among these truths are the end for which we were created; the certainty of death; the uncertainty of the time of death; the severity of God's judgment; the eternity of rewards and of punishments; the brevity of the present life; the fleeting nature of the world's pleasures, and the like.

Besides these preliminary conditions, there are others which must enter into the actual deliberation on your choice of a State of Life. The first of these is that there should be selected a suitable time in which you will be able, without let or hindrance, to give the full attention of your mind to a matter of so great importance. The time, however, of the deliberation ought not to be prolonged beyond four, or, at the most, eight days. In the second place, during this time you should withdraw yourself from your ordinary occupations and retire into solitude, according to that text: "I will lead her into solitude, and I will speak to her heart." Those persons who have the opportunity of making a retreat and of going through the Spiritual Exercises, ought to thank God for so signal a mercy. However, there are but few who can be persuaded to do this; and even among those who are willing, there are also but few who have the leisure to do it. Those who have this leisure should, as far as possible, retire into solitude by laying aside their ordinary business and their daily cares. They should forego their usual recreations, neither visiting others nor receiving visits from them; they should avoid all conversations except with their Spiritual Father; and, instead of pouring themselves out on these manifold objects which call forth their faculties from the one great and all-absorbing purpose of life, they should go to some church to visit the Beloved of their souls, to con-



verse with Him and to treat with Him about the matter which they have most at heart, calling on the Saints to aid them by their powerful suffrages to bring their suit to a favourable end. Lastly, when they enter on the deliberation itself, they should, in a most special manner, implore the divine help with all the humility and fervour of their souls, and, at the same time, should revolve in their minds either these or similar thoughts.

#### SECTION I.

*Thoughts for those who are deliberating about the choice of a State of Life.*

You have not here a lasting city. You will depart hence. You will die! Thus is it appointed for all men! At the hour at which you least are thinking of death, then you will die. You will leave all things behind you, and you will be by all things abandoned. You will enter eternity. That eternity, as the word itself implies, will never come to an end. This will be either a happy eternity among the Saints of God in the enjoyment of all that is good, or an unhappy one among the damned in the endurance of all that is evil. You are free to choose either the one or the other. Make your choice; but, understand this well—a happy eternity is the consequence of a good death, and a good death is the consequence of a good life. On the other hand, an unhappy eternity is the consequence of a bad death, a bad death is the consequence of a bad life, at least in the ordinary course of God's providence.

If you desire to die a good death and to win for yourself a happy eternity, you must of necessity choose to lead a good life, for the simple reason that you cannot count on the extraordinary favours of God. To lead a good life is to turn away, by repentance, from the evil which has been committed, and from that also which may be committed. To do good is to practise virtues with respect to God, to your neighbour, and to yourself. Any one, by the aid of God's



grace, is able to do this in any State of Life whatever, ecclesiastical, or secular, or religious.

But, carefully avoid that error into which men so frequently fall, and take notice that to be able to lead a good life is quite a different thing from actually leading one. All men are *able* to do this ; very few, comparatively speaking, actually *do* it. Do you ask why ? I will give you two reasons. First, there are fewer aids and means for turning aside from evil and for doing good in the one State than there are in the other. Secondly, there are many more hindrances to the practice of good, many more occasions of sin, and many more dangers of falling into sin in the one State than there are in the other. To be in the midst of these occasions and dangers, and not to be hurried into the commission of sin, is to be amid thorns and not to be torn by them ; to be amid snares and not to be caught by them ; to be amid the waves and not to be swallowed by them ; to be amid flames and not to be burnt by them ; to be amid enemies and not to be hurt by them ; to be in a slippery way and not to fall upon it ; to be in a labyrinth and not to be lost in it. This is the good fortune of but a very few. It is, we might say, almost a miracle.

On the other hand there are, in the one State, first, more numerous and more efficacious helps and means for leading a good life than there are in the other. Secondly, there are fewer occasions and dangers of leading a bad life in the one than there are in the other. For any one that does not, of set purpose, intend to lead a wicked life, it is not only an easy but a pleasant and almost a necessary thing in the one State to lead a good life. Therefore, we may with prudence believe that in the one State more are damned for all eternity, and that in the other more are saved for all eternity. Therefore, now that your mind is clear, and that your soul is free from every disturbing element, in God's presence make your resolve to enter some certain State of Life. If, out of a distrust in your own judgment, you look for those who will advise you, go unto those who are incorruptible, to those who are wise, to the Doctors of the

Church ; go to one who is at the point of death and who is about to be presented before the dread tribunal of God ; go to your friends who are imprisoned in the cleansing fires of Purgatory ; go to your Angel-Guardian, to the blessed Saints, yea, even to the rich glutton and to those who are lost for ever in the flames of hell ! Above all, go to Jesus Christ Who loves you more than all others can possibly love you. All will give you one and the same advice. Ah ! if you are wise, and if you have any love for yourself, choose that State which is the most secure. The more you love yourself, the less dangerous will be the State which you will choose. Urged on by prudence as well as by self-love, you are ready to do this. Therefore, as he who is about to undertake a journey chooses for himself a steed that is without fault in wind and in limb, rather than one that is lame ; as he who is about to sail the seas prefers a sea-worthy vessel to one that is leaky ; as he who is travelling takes the smooth and safe road in preference to that which is rough and insecure ; as he who is about to transact some business of great moment employs for its execution sure means rather than those that are doubtful ; and among those that are sure, selects means best adapted for gaining his end, rather than means less suited for that purpose—so do you also act. The business which you have in hand is most momentous ; it is eternity, to which you are at every moment hurrying on, and that eternity will be for you either a happy or a miserable one.

## SECTION II.

After carefully reflecting on the foregoing considerations, write on a sheet of paper the various States of Life about which you seek to deliberate. Under each of these States note down the particular end at which it aims, the principal means which it employs for gaining man's eternal destiny, its method of life, the labours to be undergone, the burthens to be borne, and the dangers to be encountered in it. In the next place, weigh well your strength of body, examine the talents which you possess, pass in review your good as well as

your bad habits, and, after duly reflecting on all these, write after each that which you are able to do and that which you are not able to do. Then accurately observe for which of these States you feel most inclination ; for how long a time you have felt this inclination ; what was the circumstance that first gave rise to the inclination ; whether it has constantly persevered ; whether it has suffered any change ; what that change is ; and whence the change took its origin. Lastly, in addition to all this, consider the motive by which you have been influenced in these matters.

When you have faithfully carried out these counsels, you must not straightway and with impetuosity leap at the conclusion which they suggest, but with most earnest prayer you must over and over again commend to God the success of your undertaking. After you have written out the paper which we have advised you to draw up, it is necessary that you should confess and communicate, in order to submit the matter to your Divine Guest, and to ask His good pleasure concerning it. At last, when you have once again carefully considered every circumstance, choose that State in which, personally, you find more helps to your salvation, fewer hindrances to the attainment of it, and better opportunities for promoting the honour and the glory of God. You may then, with perfect safety, take this step ; but, nevertheless, first ask the advice of some prudent man, lest you may not have adverted to everything about the State, and lest you may have been hurried away by the inconsiderate impetuosity of youth. For, no matter how diligent may have been the care which you have taken, it can never be so great as to render superfluous the counsel of a pious, prudent, and experienced man.

For this consultation you must choose, in preference to every one else, a pious and prudent man, who is not influenced by passion, who seeks not his own advantage and honour, but truth, the eternal wellbeing of those who ask his advice, God's honour and glory, and the manifestation of God's will, in order to carry it into effect. Hence, in this matter, you must not, without discrimination, admit to your consultations friends, relations, parents, and men of the world, but only



those among them whose sentiments are such as we have just described. After you have made your choice, it is absolutely necessary that you should lay before your Director all your desires, inclinations, and inspirations with respect to temporal as well as to spiritual things. You should let him have a clear idea of your temptations; of your internal affections and movements; also, of the good and of the evil habits which you may have contracted, as well as of the vices to which you feel yourself inclined. Unless he have all these circumstances distinctly before his eyes, it will be a difficult matter for him to point out to you in what State you will best be able to work out your salvation. Then explain to him the notes which you have made in the private examination to which you have subjected yourself. Ask his advice concerning them, and do that which he shall prescribe; for, you may be fully persuaded that the more exactly and the more diligently you follow out his instructions, the more speedily and the more certainly will you be made to know the divine will in your regard.

Although boys who are not yet fourteen years of age, ought not, by reason of their unripeness of judgment, formally to deliberate about the State of Life which they wish to embrace, nevertheless, after they come to the use of reason, they should, with all care, be taught to accustom themselves to serve God, to hate sin, to shun the dangerous occasions of offending God, to love spiritual things, to turn away from vanities, to preserve their innocence from every stain, and at Mass and at Holy Communion frequently to pray to God to make known His good pleasure respecting the State of Life which He wishes them to choose. But, after the completion of their fourteenth year, or, at least, about that time, the actual inquiry concerning the State which they ought to embrace should not any longer be deferred; for, that age is considered by the Church to be ripe enough for this inquiry, since she has decreed that when they have completed their sixteenth year they may be admitted to Religious Profession. Moreover, this period of life, by reason of its innocence, its simplicity, and the ardour of its devotion, is much more apt for the reception of divine

light, for the perception of God's will, and for the faithful execution of it, than one that is more advanced. In a word, at this stage of his existence a youth is more easily turned to virtue, is more ardent in the pursuit of it, more ready to ask and to carry into effect good advice and spiritual direction, all which, as is evident from what we have already said, are very helpful, and, ordinarily speaking, even necessary for making a judicious choice.

With regard to following out in act the vocation to which you feel that you have been called by God, you must carefully examine into the kind of life to which your choice has determined you ; for, on the nature of that life will depend the way in which you must proceed to put your resolve into execution. If you have made up your mind to enter the married state, it stands to reason that, while you are still under age, you must not think about acting on the resolution which you have made. What you must do, in the meantime, is diligently to pursue your studies, or carefully to instruct yourself in the mysteries of some profession or of some craft, and particularly to exercise yourself in the practice of piety and of virtue. Thus, at one and the same time, you will be providing for your future sustenance and be fitting yourself to bring up and to govern your household in a Christian and Catholic manner. If you have resolved to enter the Clerical State in which, according to ecclesiastical Law, no one can be admitted to Sacred Orders until his twenty-first year, you must, in the meantime, apply yourself to the study and especially to the practice of virtue, that when the time comes you may be fit for the discharge of clerical duties, and you may not imperil either your own salvation or the salvation of other men, should the care of their souls be ever intrusted to your keeping. Finally, if you have made choice of the Religious State, all delay that does not proceed from one of the causes presently to be mentioned is very hurtful and dangerous, as is proved by those writers who treat of this subject ; but, as we here touch on this matter only incidentally, we will not stay to recount the many tragical stories by which they make this evident.

The causes for which your entrance to Religious Life may lawfully be deferred are as follows :—(1) If your parents are so poor that, without your assistance, they are unable, except with great difficulty, to gain their livelihood. (2) If you cannot be received into the Religious Order so soon as you expected, although you have done your utmost to accomplish your design. (3) If you are accepted by a Religious Order, but are nevertheless advised by the Superiors to wait yet somewhat longer for the purpose of completing your studies. (4) If you are labouring under some illness which incapacitates you for bearing the burthens of Religious Life. Should this illness be of such a nature as to be incurable, this fact will be an evident sign that you are not called by God to that Order.\* For these causes entrance to Religious Life may, with good reason, be deferred.

It is the aim and the purpose of this little work to hinder this time of delay from being hurtful to those persons who feel that they have a call from God, but who are, nevertheless, unable to obey that call, in consequence of one or of another of these impediments. It is to teach them how they may most profitably spend their time in the world in preparation for worthily receiving the religious habit. Let those who, either for slight reasons or through the mischievous persuasion of others, put off their entrance into Religion, be on their guard and try to steer the vessel of their soul clear of the rocks on which the souls of others, who were influenced by similar motives, have made miserable shipwreck and perished for ever. Let them not think that they will force God to bestow on them the grace to obey His call at the time when it shall seem good to *them* to listen to it. The Spirit breathes where He wills ; He breathes and passes by. The moment

\* The *delay* spoken of in the text must be understood of a *long* delay. Whenever there is a good reason for deferring one's entrance into the Religious State or into Clerical life, it is advisable to put off presenting one's self for acceptance into the one or into the other. A delay of six months, or of even a year or two, would not, according to circumstances, be considered to be *long*. Grave inconvenience to others, in consequence of our leaving home, would constitute a sufficiently valid reason for delaying our entrance into Religion or into the Clerical State.



for the distribution of His favours has been preordained by Him ; it is not subject to the caprice of wayward men.

In addition to all that has already been said, you must keep the following principles steadily in view during the course of your deliberation on this matter :

(1) It is a sure sign that God does not will you to choose any State for the performance of the duties of which you have neither the ability nor any hope of acquiring the ability.

(2) No prudent man ought to choose a State of Life simply and solely because either his relatives or his friends have been in it.

(3) Your last end must ever be kept in view. This end is nothing else than the honour and the service of God, and your own eternal salvation. Hence, all such reasons as urge you to make your choice through motives of flesh and blood, or to win the applause and the goodwill of men, or to procure sensual pleasure, must not, by any means, be suffered to sway your counsels. No State of Life should ever be chosen on account of such reasons or be rejected because of them ; for, it is certain that the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God. That you should firmly hold this opinion is a matter of the greatest importance.

(4) In time of consolation or of desolation, no definite resolve ought ever to be made.

(5) A vow must never be taken without the approbation of your Spiritual Father.

(6) Vocations that are sudden and impetuous are always to be regarded with suspicion. They are rarely made of durable stuff, and, therefore, they should be carefully searched into before they are followed.

(7) When actually deliberating about your vocation, the four trusty Councillors—Death, Judgment, Hell, and Heaven—must never be set aside. Their advice should always be listened to, and strenuous efforts should be made diligently to carry it into effect.

Lastly, bear in mind that it is a very serious matter for any one to choose a State of Life for which he is manifestly unsuited, or to which he perceives that he is not called by

God, or who is in doubt whether there is not in the way some secret impediment for the removal of which he does not employ moral diligence. Hence, that person is guilty of a grievous sin who enters a Religious Order knowing that he is labouring under some infirmity, or that he has some bodily defect on account of which he feels certain that in a short time he will not be able to go through the duties of Regular Observance; or, although he does not feel certain, but he has only some doubt about it, yet he does not take the trouble to consult those who could enlighten him upon the subject.\* Now, although this obligation rests on each person in particular, nevertheless, because it may happen that owing to his youth he either may not give to these matters that attentive consideration which they deserve, or may not have a sufficiently serious idea of their gravity, it is the praiseworthy custom of almost all Religious Orders to subject to a rigorous examination those who apply to them for the habit. To their various questions Superiors require them, sometimes even upon oath, to give a truthful answer, in order by these stringent measures to hinder the losses which might otherwise accrue to the Order, and to ward off the countless ills which might arise from the neglect of these salutary precautions.

\* If this is true of bodily defects and infirmities, with far greater reason is it true of habits of grievous sin which the would-be Religious or the would-be Priest has not been able to overcome. Also it is true of a *distaste* for the duties and the occupations of the life to which the person aspires.

## CHAPTER II

### INSTRUCTION FOR THOSE WHO ARE THINKING OF ENTERING THE ORDER OF ST. BENEDICT

THE Benedictine Order derives its name from St. Benedict, whose life and praises, written by St. Gregory the Great, may be found in the fourth book of the Dialogues of that illustrious Pontiff. It came into existence about the year 510. During that year and in those which immediately followed, twelve Monasteries were established in the province of Valeria. About the year 529, our holy Father went to Monte Cassino and there built the Monastery which is known even to the present day by the name of that place. It was there, as we learn from St. Gregory that, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he wrote his Rule "which is excellent for discretion and eloquent in style."\* He began to write this Rule at Subiaco, about the year 510, and finished it at Monte Cassino, about the year 536. It was first approved of, in the usual manner, by the Bishops of the various Dioceses in which St. Benedict and his disciples founded Monasteries. After this, towards the year 562, it was implicitly approved of by Pope John III., who, in a document granting certain privileges to the Monastery of St. Medard, says: "Let the Monks freely and without hindrance devote themselves to the service of God, and in all their acts obey the Rule of St. Benedict." A third and explicit approbation was given to it by St. Gregory the Great, in a Synod held at Rome in the year 595. A fourth approbation was accorded to it by Pope Zachary, who in the year 741, came to the Chair of St. Peter.

\* *Dialog.*, lib. iv., cap. 36.



St. Placid, the protomartyr of our Order, was the first to introduce into Sicily the Holy Rule, while its saintly author was still alive. St. Maurus carried it with him into France; and, in course of time, a whole army of illustrious men, conspicuous for their learning and their sanctity, diffused the laws of the holy Patriarch throughout almost the whole world.

The principal end of this Order is primarily and chiefly to secure, with the aid of divine grace and by the means furnished by a contemplative life, the personal sanctification and salvation of its individual members. It is not, however, repugnant to its purpose, that those who enrol themselves under its standard should apply themselves to the apostolic work of trying to save the souls of other men by the duties of the active life. This may be said to have been a part of its purpose even from its very foundation by St. Benedict; nevertheless, in such a way part of its purpose that, the active life must always be secondary to the contemplative life, and be undertaken by the members of the Order only when Superiors shall permit it, and in that measure which it shall please them to sanction. For the attainment of personal sanctity the Order employs those three means which are common to other Religious Orders, namely, the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

The vow of poverty consists in the abdication, by Religious, of all proprietorship and of all right to have or to possess or to dispose of anything as if it was their own. So that a Religious, whether within or without the Monastery, may not, under any pretext, have as his own, or possess, or receive, or give to another anything whatsoever, unless for so doing he has from his Superior free permission which either is tacitly given or is at least reasonably presumed. All things are left in the hands of the Superior, and he may dispose of them at his pleasure.\* Superfluities, however, may not be held even with the Superior's permission. All this must be understood of the poverty of the individual members

\* Taking care, however, to observe the Canon Law in the disposal of property.

of the Order. As a Community, they have dominion, properly so called, of which the administrators are the Abbot and the Officials appointed by him.

The vow of chastity imposes the obligation of perpetually abstaining not only from all unlawful actions contrary to that virtue, but from those which are lawful ; and this obligation extends not only to acts but to desires, and to complacency in anything that is opposed to chastity. Therefore, a Religious who commits any sin against this vow incurs, besides the guilt of a grave transgression against the sixth commandment, the additional guilt of the sin of sacrilege.

The vow of obedience consists in the perpetual denial of one's own judgment and of one's own will ; in readiness to obey ; and in actual obedience to Superiors in all things that are not against, or below, or beyond the Rule. In order that this obedience may be virtuous and meritorious, it is not enough simply to fulfil the command of him who issues the order ; in addition to this, the order must be executed without murmuring of heart or of tongue, with a good will, and on the impulse of some supernatural motive.

Besides these vows which are common to all Religious Bodies, our Order takes on itself two other means of perfection and makes special mention of them in the act of Profession. The first of these is *stability*, by which a Benedictine is obliged not only not to wish to return to a worldly life or to go to a less severe Order, but, even within his own Order, not to go from one Monastery to another, or to live outside the cloister of the Monastery in which he was professed, or in the world, or in other Monasteries.\* The second is what is called *amendment of manners*. This is a zeal for and an attempt to reach perfection, by conformity with the Rule of St. Benedict, or by the practice of virtues marked out for us by rule, even when the Superior does not compel us to be zealous for and to make efforts to attain, perfection. Therefore, the aim of a Benedictine ought to be, not only not to violate any of his vows, but to

\* Through necessity, or through utility, a Monk may live out of his cloister.

observe them day by day with an ever increasing degree of perfection.

The Benedictine spirit consists in true and complete obedience, and because our holy Father says that "the first degree of humility is obedience,"\* it must consist in humility also. Hence, he who enters this Order ought to be resolved never at any time, or for any reason, to wish, or to pretend, or to try either directly or indirectly to exercise any office or any ministry in religion, in parishes or in any other capacity,† or to retain that office or that ministry for a longer or for a shorter period, or in any way whatever that is not in conformity with that which shall seem good to the Abbot. Moreover, he ought to be so indifferent, so tranquil, so ready to yield himself up to the orders of obedience, as to commit to God and to his Superior for love of God, because the Superior is God's vicar, all care of himself with respect to employments and to other matters of a similar nature.

The same spirit should make him readily accept all lowly and abject duties, if any of these should ever be assigned to him; and should he never be intrusted with any office except one that is laborious and humble, he should remain in perfect contentment of mind. The good service of obedience must be given not only to the Abbot, but to the Superiors whom it may please him to appoint, and even unto one another. This last-named obedience, however, must be so arranged that the due subordination of one person to another be not lost sight of.

In such matters as food, drink, clothing, bedding, place of abode, and the like, the Benedictine method of life, although much softened, is, nevertheless, quite rigorous enough to secure all the ends for which corporal austerity is employed by religious men. Permission to eat flesh meat has, in

\* *Reg. I., cap. v.*

† This does not apply to the Anglo-Benedictine Congregation, to which missionary work has been intrusted by the Holy See. Each of its members may be sent forth from the Monastery to share in the labours of the pastoral office. It is the Superiors, however, that determine the time at which their subjects are to begin and the time at which they are to desist from the glorious task, where it is to be undertaken, and in what measure they are to devote themselves to it.



almost all places, been granted by a legitimate dispensation from the Holy See;\* in many Monasteries, however, the fasts ordained by the Rule, on Wednesdays, on Fridays, and during Advent, are strictly observed. Nevertheless, anyone, with the permission of his Superior or of his Spiritual Father, may without singularity live a still more mortified life.

From the very foundation of the Order the public worship of God in choral psalmody has ever been regarded as one of the principal duties of St. Benedict's children; and this duty they have always performed to the immense advantage both of the Church at large and of private individuals. So highly has it been esteemed by our Fathers that, not content with offering it up to God at stated times during the night and during the day, they have, in many places, established what is called "the round of perpetual praise,"† in order that, during the day and during the night, there may not be an hour in which the incense of prayer is not ascending before the throne of God. Our esteem for this sacred duty and our care to perform it with due solemnity, ought not to be less during these our days than they were in the days that have gone by; but, with respect to celebrating it during the night hours, the custom is not the same in all places. In some Monasteries, Matins are begun at about four o'clock in the morning, while in others, the ancient practice of rising to chant them a little after midnight is still kept up in full vigour.

Besides Choir-duties, Benedictine Monks have to meditate, to read, to pray, to learn the ecclesiastical chant and the ceremonial of the Church; they have to apply to study;‡ to

\* Granted in 1336 by Pope Benedict XII.

† *Laus perennis*.

‡ The studies of any Religious Order are determined by the end which it proposes to itself, as one of the subordinate aims of its existence. In our Congregation this end is twofold—namely, the instruction of youth in our Colleges, and the pastoral work of the Apostolic Mission. Therefore, the studies by which we prepare ourselves to gain this end are directed to the acquisition of that learning which will make us efficient professors and enlightened pastors of souls. With regard to the Professors of our Colleges, it is the duty of Superiors to select for this office only those that are thoroughly competent to discharge this

manual labour; to the copying of books; they have to teach humanities and the higher studies in the Colleges; to administer the sacraments to the faithful; to instruct in Christian doctrine children and the uneducated; to preach and to give missions. Some of these occupations are common to the whole Order as well as to each of its members; others, however, are common to the whole Order, but yet in such a way that it is left to the prudence of the Superior to select the occupations which shall be intrusted to each person in particular. Therefore, it is not true, that the Benedictine Life is an idle one; or that there is not in it any scope for the use of talent; or that talent is held in but scant esteem in its Monasteries.

St. Benedict gives to his children four tests by which to try by what spirit those persons are led who wish to enter his Order. He bids them inquire, first, whether the Novice truly seeks God; secondly, whether he is eager for the "Work of God,"—that is to say, the Divine Office, or any other duty connected with the service of God; thirdly, whether he is eager for obedience; fourthly, whether he is

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important function. If none such can be found among their subjects, they are bound, in justice to the parents who intrust their children to them, to seek elsewhere for men who are able to instruct these children in the various branches of knowledge which enter into the curriculum of a liberal education. The course of studies by which our Religious are trained and fitted for the duties of their missionary life is fixed by the Constitutions of our Congregation. These Constitutions ordain that each Monk shall go through a complete course of ecclesiastical studies, consisting of two years of philosophy, and of three or four years of theology. Every year he is subjected to a rigorous examination. If he is discovered to be an apt scholar, he is ordered by Superiors frequently to exercise himself in public disputations, so as to fit himself to defend a theological or a philosophical thesis before the Academy or the University at which he is studying. Should he show himself to be careless about these matters, he is not suffered to go on the Apostolic Mission. The Fathers who drew up these various enactments were so deeply impressed with the necessity for the acquisition of ecclesiastical science, that they empowered the President-General to *compel* the Superiors of the various Monasteries to be diligent in fostering these ecclesiastical studies. To make sure that these ordinances concerning studies have been faithfully carried out, the *Regulæ Missionis* furthermore require that, before any Monk shall be declared fit for the care of souls, he must have gone through the complete course of philosophy and of theology, and have devoted two years more to the study of casuistry, polemical theology, and Sacred Scripture.

eager for "humiliation." The time requisite for the Novitiate is one full, entire year. At the end of that year, the Profession is made, and the Novice, after having made it, "is not allowed," as our holy Father says, "to go forth from the Monastery, or to shake off the yoke of the Rule, which yoke, after so mature a deliberation, he might either have accepted or refused."

The Benedictine Order differs from the Mendicant Order and from several others, in this, that it is not ruled by one head, but it is divided into Congregations, such as the German, the Swiss, the Bavarian, the English, in each of which the supreme head is the President ; next to him come the Visitors ; but each Monastery is ruled by its Abbot or by its Prior, as the case may be. Every Monastery has its own Prior or its own Abbot ; but among the Monasteries and among the Abbots there is no connection which induces dependence on and subordination to one another. In some Congregations the Abbots are perpetual ; but in others they are elected for a certain fixed number of years, and on the expiration of their term of office, they may be superseded by others who are chosen to take their places.



## CHAPTER III

### PRACTICAL CONCLUSIONS TO BE DRAWN FROM THE PRECEDING CHAPTER

ALTHOUGH many are the prerogatives of this holy Order which has given to the heavenly Kingdom so many famous Saints, and to our holy Mother the Church so many Pontiffs, Cardinals, Patriarchs, Archbishops, Bishops, Apostolic men, learned Doctors, zealous promoters of devotion to our Lady, authors of Sacred Rites, inventors of various arts, and enlightened students of sciences which have helped to advance the wellbeing of peoples and of nations ; nevertheless, we pass over all these and others of a similar nature, from the conviction that he who is deliberating about embracing a particular State of Life ought to confine his attention chiefly to an examination of the end which the Religious Order proposes to itself, of the means which it employs to gain that end, of the ability which he himself possesses for carrying out that end, and for using those means, and, lastly, of the obstacles which may stand in his way to hinder him from following his wishes. For, what use will the sanctity of a Religious Order be to him, or what advantage will the number of its illustrious children bring to him, if he have neither the courage nor the strength to reach their lofty sanctity, or to imitate their virtuous lives ? Therefore, hold in high esteem all the holy Orders that have been approved of by the Church ; and if you feel that you are called to any one of them, do not choose that one which surpasses the rest in the brilliancy of its prerogatives, but that one which, after a careful consideration of the end proposed and the means employed by it to gain

that end, shall seem to you, with the aid of God's all-helping grace, to be best adapted for winning perfection and for securely leading you to the kingdom of heaven. Look on it as a sure sign of a bad spirit, if you are so drawn to one Order, or to one particular Monastery, as to condemn in heart or in word, any other Order, or any other Monastery; for, where charity is not, there the Spirit of God cannot be. God is Charity; and he that abideth in charity abideth in God, and God in him.\*

With respect to the particular end which the Benedictine Order proposes to itself,† take notice that, if you perceive yourself to be called by God, to labour chiefly for the salvation of souls, it would not be wise of you to enter this Order, since it might happen that you would never be appointed by your Superiors to perform works of the active life.‡ In like manner, your choice of the Benedictine Order would not be a good one, if you were so bent on living in it for your own personal sanctification only as not to be ready, at the bidding of Superiors, to undertake works of the active life; for, as almost every Monastery has attached to it the care of the souls of those who worship in its church, and of those also who live in places which are subject to and which belong to it, it is necessary that each member of the Community, as far as in him lies, should be prepared to perform these parochial duties whenever it shall seem good to his Superiors to appoint him to them, in order that in this way the obligations imposed by pious founders may be satisfied, and the common good of the faithful be preserved from harm. Moreover, weigh well the advantages and the disadvantages which a mixed life of this kind brings with it. But, at the same time, bear in mind that he who humbly, obediently,

\* 1 *St. John*, iv.

† See preceding chapter.

‡ In the English Benedictine Congregation every member either is sent, or he may be sent, to work on the mission. Like a soldier, he both goes forth and returns at the word of command. Whenever he is kept in the Monastery for his whole life, or for the greater part of it, it is because the good of his Congregation requires it. The general rule is that, at some time or other, he is sent to share in the glorious labour of saving the souls for which Christ died.

and for the love of God, submits to the guidance of his Superiors and puts himself at their disposal, will escape almost all the dangers that threaten stability; whereas these same dangers ought to fill with fear the heart of him who, of his own free-will and under pretence of zeal for souls, but in reality out of a love of his own ease and for other motives of a similar nature, either wrings from his unwilling Superiors the charge of a parish, or accepts and performs the duties of this important office which has been freely given to him, but performs them, not with a pure intention, but for the purpose of suiting his own personal convenience. We have said that to enter the Benedictine Order would not be wise, on the part of a person who perceives that God is calling him to labour chiefly for the conversion of souls. Yet it should ever be borne in mind that our neighbours' salvation is promoted not only by preaching and parochial work, but by prayer—and especially by the prayer of the Divine Office—by good example and by works of piety, all which may be performed within the walls of our homes. Therefore, a careful examination should be made by those who are deliberating about their vocation, in order to see whether they can discover in themselves any signs that God is calling them to the active work of labouring for the salvation of their neighbours' souls. If they discover that these manifestations of His will are to be found in their case, they must not lose sight of that which we have already said—namely, that, in our Order, they may never be appointed to share in these holy and apostolic labours.\* Nevertheless, occasions will not be wanting, when even those who are not destined for this honourable office may manifest their zeal for souls in that secondary way of which we have already spoken. This way is oftentimes the source of greater advantages to the faithful, and it is attended with less danger to the individual Religious, than

\* This holds good of the English Benedictine Congregation also, in which missionary work has so prominent a place; for though its members may be sent to work on the missions, yet they cannot claim it as a right, and they may be, and they often are, never sent at all.



are those praiseworthy works of the external, active life led by even the most laborious of the parochial Clergy.

With respect to the other means of sanctification which are common to all Religious Orders,—that is to say, the three Vows, remember : (1) It is far better not to make vows than, when they have been made, not to keep them. (2) With regard to poverty, you must be resolved to divest yourself of all affection towards temporal goods, of whatever kind they may be, and to divest yourself of that affection, for the whole period of your mortal life. See, therefore, that you fall not into a trap which commonly enough ensnares many, a trap which, on that very account, is all the more dangerous. From time to time either you will see, or you will hear, that certain Religious, and especially those who hold office, possess many things which ought to be accounted mere superfluities and curiosities rather than necessities. On such occasions, what is more natural than that you should say within yourself : “After my Novitiate and the lapse of a few years, I also shall be in possession of similar goods.” See that you assent not to a suggestion so hurtful to the spirit of true monasticism, and, above all things, that you embrace not the Religious State in the hope that you will be able to satisfy this greed for having and for holding ; for, if these be your intentions, you will run the risk of losing your eternal reward. The spirit which you ought to bring with you to the cloister must be one full of eagerness to observe the Vows ; not one easily moulded by the example of this or of that particular Religious, but, fashioned on the prescriptions of the Rule, on the example of the Saints, and on their teaching. Without this spirit, you will expose yourself to a thousand dangers of falling into grievous errors. Therefore, the securing of it is a matter worthy of your most careful attention. Hence, unless you are firmly resolved to give up, for the whole term of your mortal life, all affection to any possessions whatever, and not to use them unless it shall seem good to your Superior to allow you to use them, you do not yet grasp the idea of what it is to vow perpetual poverty ; and, there-

fore, you must humbly pray God to give you a clearer insight into this most important matter.

With respect to chastity which is the second substantial vow, we place before you for your most serious consideration a circumstance of the greatest moment. Carefully examine into the life which you have hitherto led. Has it been free from any disgraceful fall into the vice which is opposed to the angelic virtue? If you have at any time fallen, have you seriously risen from your fall, and how long a time has elapsed since your conversion? Have you sunk yourself so deeply in the mire that it will be most difficult for you to extricate yourself from it, on account of the evil habits which you have contracted? If you can say that you are of the number of those who have not fallen into this sin, then, trusting in the grace of God, embrace the Religious Life. But, as God resists the proud and gives His grace only to the humble, frequently suffering those who have heretofore led innocent lives, as far as this matter of purity is concerned, shamefully to fall into sin as a punishment of their pride, beware, and see that you never allow this vice to enter your heart. Do not presume on your virtue; for, if you do, you will run great risk of losing in Religious Life, by a double crime of sacrilege and of impurity, that treasure which, by the merciful protection of God, you have preserved intact amid the dangers of the world. But if, unfortunately, you are of the number of those who have fallen and contracted the *habit* of this sin, even in that case you cannot be hindered from entering Religion, since the fact of having fallen is not an impediment to taking that step. The doctrine of St. Thomas on this matter is worthy of note; for, he teaches that boys who have fallen into the sin of impurity, recent converts to the Faith who may have led incontinent lives, and sinners who have turned from their evil courses, may all be admitted to Religious Life. "Now, although we should not dare to gainsay this opinion, both because we have a great reverence for the Angelic Doctor and because we have known a few such persons whose entrance into Religion in these circumstances has been

crowned with success, yet we have never advised anyone to embrace our State that, for at least six months before so doing, had not withheld himself from the commission of all mortal sin, and that did not give us reason to hope that he would never again fall into it. For, ordinarily speaking, those who do not fulfil these conditions either do not persevere in Religion, or, if they do, they continue to offend God by mortal sin, which is sometimes known by others; they make the House of God, as far as in them lies, a very den of thieves; they deprive themselves of the spiritual advantages which our State brings to those who live religiously in it, and they not unfrequently render our very calling itself infamous by their public scandals and sometimes by their apostasy."\* All this is true of any one that sins mortally; but it is especially true of those who grievously offend God by sinning against chastity. These persons must be careful not to take on themselves the burthen of the Religious Life for any other purpose than to satisfy God for their sins and to bring forth worthy fruits of penance. According to St. Gregory: "Worthy fruits of penance are brought forth by that man who, in exact proportion to the extent in which he heretofore indulged in that which is unlawful, now withholds himself from the enjoyment of even that which is lawful." Therefore, he who desires to fortify himself against a relapse and to escape the peril of eternal damnation, must keep alive within himself, during the whole period of his mortal life, the spirit of sincere repentance.

With respect to those who have not only miserably fallen back into their sins, but who are bound down with the chain of an evil habit, this is our verdict, resting on the judgment of men who are renowned for their prudence: Not only we do not advise them to enter our Order, but we have no hesitation whatever in most earnestly dissuading them from taking that step; not indeed because we think, as some persons have asserted concerning our own and other Religious Bodies, that the life in it and in them is of too easy a nature

\* F. Lancisius, Opus. i., cap. 10.



to help sinners to overcome their passions ; God forbid that we should ever entertain any such idea, or that we should fasten on our own or on any other Religious Order a charge so calumnious ! This would be to admit that we are destitute of those means by which even the most abandoned may, by the aid of God's all-helping grace, return from the evil of their ways. The reason why we dissuade from entering Religion any one that is a slave to this vice, is a reason drawn from the person of the habitual sinner himself. It is because he will culpably neglect to use for self-correction those means which the Order puts into his hands.

What then, you will say, is your advice to those who are thus circumstanced ? We answer : " Let them enter the married state." But, if they perceive that they are called by God to the Religious Life, let them choose an Order which is very austere in point of *bodily* mortification. This the Benedictine Order certainly is not. We would never advise any one that is ruled by an overmastering habit of vice to enter our Order. For, although the exercise of internal mortification is in full vigour among its members, and although there is maintained in all external observances, a moderately rigorous discipline which any one, with leave of his Superior, is at liberty to supplement by still greater austerities, nevertheless, so vigorous is the vitality of an evil habit, that unless those who have been under its sway be *forced* to employ sharper methods of mortification, and unless the very roots of their unruly passions be, as it were, with violence, plucked out of them, these roots will almost for a certainty burst afresh through the thin layer of virtue's soil which has been spread over them.

It will be understood, as a matter of course, that we except from these general rules all those particular cases concerning which we have moral certainty of the marvellous change wrought by the hand of the Most High. He is able, with the greatest ease, suddenly to enrich the poor ; to raise the needy from the dust ; to exalt the beggar from the dunghill ; to seat him among the princes of His people ;

and it may be that he who is thus favoured will, in the kingdom of God, far surpass many of those who have led innocent lives. This conclusion might be proved by the examples of many men who, after having in the world lived most wickedly, have been mercifully snatched by God from their evil courses and set on the path of righteousness. Many of these, in our own Order, have reached an eminent degree of sanctity. Their names are now written in the catalogue of the Saints, and from their thrones in heaven they invite all, no matter how wicked their lives may be, to give up sin and to tread in their footsteps. They exhort them, by a strong and persevering purpose of amendment, accompanied by a penitential life, to open wide to the influence of divine goodness, the doors of their hearts, which for years have been locked fast against it.

We will reserve for a future Section that which we have to say about obedience. In that Section we will put before you some few considerations which are well worthy of your notice.

You must not forget that stability strews very grave difficulties in the path of a man who is headstrong and censorious; who is desirous of seeing and of being seen; who is a lover of novelty and full of the spirit of contradiction; who wishes that all things should be regulated to meet his views; who is restless and puffed up with the malignant spirit of pride. To such a man as this, who wrongly attributes to those Orders which profess stability, all the inconveniences that, in reality, spring from his own heart, Superiors naturally enough seem despotic and unsympathetic, companions and brethren appear to be wondrously imperfect, and they are, of course, the causes of his disgust and his weariness. Sameness of place is to him a grievous burthen, hateful and irksome beyond the power of human endurance. His cell is too small. His Monastery is without renown among men. Anyone thus disposed will advance both his own eternal salvation and the wellbeing of Religion, by carefully abstaining from entering either this or any other Order. He, however, who is well-

disposed, charitable, gentle, humble, unselfish, and patient, need not fear the inconveniences of stability; he will draw thence, even in this life, signal fruit and merit, and in the life to come, glory that will never fade. Now is the time to think the matter over within your own heart and to choose that which you wish and which you ought to choose.

With respect to amendment of manners—*conversio morum*—it is very necessary that you should bring with you to Religious Life an ardent desire of spiritual progress, and a practical love and esteem of the means which Holy Religion affords and prescribes for ensuring that progress. Know, therefore, that you must lay aside the manners of the world. At the same time that you cast off its dress, you must divest yourself of its sentiments, of its way of acting and of living. For, if you leave the world in body only, and bring with you to Religious life worldliness in your heart and in your manners, without having any serious and efficacious purpose of correcting your defects, it would be much better for you to remain in the world in body also, rather than that, by the combination of two things so incompatible as are the world and Religion, you should introduce to the Cloister a monstrosity hateful to God and disgraceful to the Religious State.

Since the spirit of the Rule and of the Benedictine Order consists, as we have already said, in obedience and in humility, it is sufficiently evident, we think, that it is to the interest of him who aspires to be a member of the Order, to enter it with his heart already imbued with these virtues, or to have his soul free from those dispositions which are hostile to them. These dispositions are boldness, arrogance, and pride. Unless these unlovely weeds which usually push themselves to the surface of a hard and obstinate character, be speedily plucked up by the very roots, they will scatter on every side noxious germs which will prove most fatal to obedience and to humility, twin fruits which thrive and flourish in every well-regulated Monastery and in every Religious Order that is worthy of the name. Therefore, let him who is deliberating with himself about entering any of



the various Orders, examine with special care whether these pernicious weeds are springing up in the soil of his heart. Let him diligently search into his character to see whether he is bold, forward, and arrogant, whether he is obstinately bent on having his own way and stiff-necked in maintaining his own opinions. If he comes to the conclusion that he is, let him, as speedily as possible, pluck up, scatter and destroy these hurtful weeds; or, if he will not act in this way, let him not presume to disfigure and to infect with the tares of his faulty character the flourishing garden of Holy Religion. Moreover, to the Benedictine spirit are diametrically opposed those purposes, those hopes, and those other vain projects which some persons cherish in their minds, of one day coming forth before the world and of filling certain honourable offices which will serve to show off their talents. If these ideas are in your mind, now that you are deliberating about this State of Life, first of all completely wipe them from the tablets of your memory, and then entertain the design of entering the Cloister. If you do not act thus, you will there seek in vain for any consolation, and you will be troubled with a thousand anxious thoughts.

With respect to what has been said in the preceding chapter on the subject of austerity, three things are to be kept in view.

First, from the fact that the Benedictine method of life is a mitigated form of monastic observance, it would be quite a mistake to infer that it is, therefore, a soft and lax method, one that is void of austerity.

Secondly, that these mitigations permitted in less rigid Orders are granted because of various weaknesses; they are not given that those persons who do not need them may employ them to suit their own ease and comfort; but that those who, from time to time, require some little indulgence may not have any cause or any occasion of murmuring, or of being sad, or of giving over their eagerness in the service of God, through the absence of such indulgences—and this, too, to the great detriment of regular observance—or of procuring these conveniences and these little privileges from

other sources. It is evident from this that those persons are guilty of mocking God who, on entering Religion, are bent on following a lax mode of life, and who put it before themselves almost as the end of their existence; for, they prove by this conduct that their intention is not to serve God, but their appetites and their unruly flesh. This is a snare against which those persons ought to be specially on their guard who in the world are living in poverty, and who, consequently, may look on Religious Life as a more comfortable mode of existence.

Thirdly, that the internal austerities to be endured in this Order are neither few in number nor light in weight. Therefore, though it is less rigorous in appearance than other Orders are, yet there are to be endured in it far more bodily inconveniences than those who have not had experience of them would ever suspect. Consequently, any one that enters it must be prepared manfully, perseveringly, and with a resolute will, to bear all that is hard, painful, and contrary to the natural inclinations of flesh and blood; for, if he be not thus disposed, either he will fail through sheer weariness and disgust, or he will lead a miserable life through the repugnance of his will which, by its fretting, will eat away the very life of his frail tenement of clay.

With respect to the observation which we made in one of the paragraphs of the preceding chapter, the Postulant must take into consideration his bodily strength, to see whether it will be equal to the performance of the Choir duties which have to be gone through both by day and by night. But it is of even greater importance than this, to rid his mind of that false idea concerning the perpetuity of Choir work, namely, that it begets in the heart an intolerable weariness. This is far from being true; for, the duty of Choir is a source of consolation and of joy to those Religious who, in fervour and in humility, truly seek God. Of this fact those persons who have had experience in the "Work of God" are fully aware, and the Postulant himself will taste this joy and will feel this consolation, if he aim at being of the number of those who are fervent and humble. But if he think that Choir

work is suitable only for those that are unfit for any other employment, that are illiterate and simple-minded, he will most certainly feel the duties of the Divine Office an intolerable weariness. Any one thus disposed is unworthy, even once to perform, in the presence of God, of His Angels, and of right-minded men, an action of so great worth. Therefore, it will be far better for him to devote to the ordinary business of a secular life whatever ability he may chance to possess, rather than enter the Cloister with notions such as these and thereby contribute to the destruction of religious humility and devotion. However, it will be well for him to hear what are the sentiments of the Saints with respect to this solemn rite. St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi says: "So high is the dignity of the office of praising God in Choir, that the blessed Spirits, pure as they are, scarcely dare, with fear and trembling, to perform it." A little farther on she continues: "The spiritual exercise which is most pleasing to God and which wins the greatest share of His divine favour, is collectively and individually to praise Him. This truth, however, is but little understood." Again; "Compared with the celebration of the Divine Office in Choir, private meditation and private prayer are of little worth."\* We forbear to add anything further to these words; for, from them you will easily perceive what are the sentiments of those who are filled with the Spirit of God, concerning this important religious duty.

With respect to the observations made in another paragraph of the preceding chapter, the Postulant must once

\* According to the universal *consensus* of Theologians, meditation is more excellent than psalmody. Therefore, some explanation is necessary in order to get at the true meaning of this sentence. When the Saint says that "private meditation and private prayer are of little worth compared with the celebration of the Divine Office in Choir," she is doubtless speaking of psalmody in one of these two ways: (1) "*In sensu composito*, that is to say, psalmody is better than meditation when obedience calls us to psalmody. (2) *Secundum quid*, that is to say, better by reason of some special kind of merit resulting from it, as if we were to say, speaking of satisfactory merit, 'the merit of prayer is quite inferior to that of almsgiving': or again, speaking of the merit of reward in heaven, 'the merit of almsgiving is little compared with that of bodily austerities.'"



again examine whether he has the strength and the talent requisite for the performance of these duties. Also, he must be careful to shift from his path that rock of offence deposited there by the author of the calumnious assertion that, "in this Order, scarcely any use is made of talent, both because in Monastic Houses talent is held in little esteem, and because the localities in which these Houses are situated do not afford any scope for the exercise of it." Again; "With the exception of Choir work and the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the Benedictine life is all idleness." These and other sayings of a similar nature have in them an ill-omened ring. However, as it is not our purpose to refute these absurdities, but to point out to those who are deliberating about the choice of a State of Life, a smooth and safe path which will conduct them without fail to the end which they propose to themselves, all that we ask of you is that you suffer not yourself to be blown about by every windy word that is uttered; but first carefully search into that which is said to see whether it is *true*. When you have done this, you may proceed to act on the conclusion at which you have arrived. Unless you accustom yourself to this method of procedure, you will expose yourself to errors without number, to the peril of losing your vocation and of straying from the right path.

Take notice, therefore, that nothing so stands in the way of spiritual progress and of the attainment of even eternal salvation itself as does an idle life, from which are generated all kinds of vicious habits. In order not to lead such a life, you must bring with you to Religion the determined will strenuously to labour for God till your last breath. Whoever with this resolve enters the Cloister, need not fear that he will not be able to find both work on which to exercise his talents and occasions of using them to the best advantage. These talents, be it observed, are oftenest employed with greater safety to ourselves and with more profit to our neighbours, in places far removed from the haunts of men, than in the great centres of industry, in which we run the risk of being ruined by the adulation of those who are but

too ready to flatter our inborn vanity. But if any one have not the intention of labouring for God, it would be better for him to remain in the world. He has no right whatever to consume the substance of pious founders and to occupy the place of a strenuous worker. But, in addition to this, let him bear in mind the strict account which he will one day have to give of the talents which he has hidden under a bushel, either by not using them, or by using them in such a way as practically to make them of no avail.

As, in the "Retreat for Postulants," we shall have to speak at considerable length of the characteristic marks of a Novice and of the trials to which he is subjected, we will not here enter into any further details on these matters; we will content ourselves with counselling you diligently to search into all your natural propensities, whether good or evil, and to consider how it will fare with them when tested by the trials to which you will be exposed. The energy and the regular observance of your Religious Life will depend on whether these propensities can bear these tests. Above all things take special care to have a pure and sincere intention of truly seeking God, by your entrance into this Order, since without this intention it is impossible for you to persevere in Religion, or, if you persevere, to live in it with a peaceful mind.

He who is thinking about entering our Order ought, after he has determined to choose our State of Life, to proceed still farther in his deliberations, by fixing on the place and the Monastery in which he wishes to follow out his vocation. But, on this important point, let him first, in prayer, take counsel with God, then seek advice of some prudent man, and lastly, consult the wishes of his own heart. For, as this Order is not ruled by one head, but each Monastery is governed by an Abbot in whose person is vested the right of receiving Postulants to the Novitiate, and, as there is a great diversity of practice and of observance in these different Monasteries, you must specially consider in what place and in what Monastery you desire to test your stability and to dedicate yourself wholly to the service of God. Concerning

these practices and observances which must, of necessity, be submitted to your consideration, we think that they may be reduced to two classes, the first of which embraces those disciplinary observances which are in force in any given place, and the second, all such matters as your own bodily strength and natural constitution.

With respect to the first class, examine whether the vows are observed in any given Monastery, and in what way they are observed; whether charity, humility, and religious decorum flourish among the Brethren; whether vices, scandals, and freedom from restraint are held in abomination by them, and, whenever they crop up, are visited with suitable chastisement. Take notice, however, that Regular Observance is in full vigour, not only in those places in which there are no evils—and these places are few in number, since in even the Apostolic College one traitor was found—but also in those Monasteries in which there are some few who are evil and vicious, provided only that their vices and their evils are not suffered to go unpunished.

With respect to the second class, consider whether the situation of the Monastery will be hurtful to your bodily health, and whether you have strength sufficient to undergo the work which is usually performed there. Full of vanity, however, are all those considerations made by certain persons, about the splendour of the monastic buildings, the grandeur of the Monastery, the number of its servants, its privileges, its fare, the recreations permitted there, and other matters of a similar nature. Those who either give a thought to such matters as these, or consider that some account ought to be taken of them, clearly show that they savour not the things that are above, but the things that are below. They are seeking after temporal advantages, not after the honour and the glory of Christ.

Neither any place nor any Monastery ought to be held in less esteem because men of the world say: "Those who live there are melancholy in mood, bilious in temperament, strange in dress, and uncouth in manner." For these very reasons it ought to be regarded as worthy of greater venera-



tion ; for, in it little chance will be given for conversing with the world ; religious modesty is carefully guarded ; no dissolute behaviour is perceived ; there is no levity, no excess in words or in acts. Would that every Cloister were peopled with similar melancholy, bilious, and strange-mannered men ! Finally, the perpetuity of Abbots will not seem a grievous burthen to a Religious that is humble and obedient, no matter how heavy may be the crosses and how disagreeable the inconveniences which thence arise. These inconveniences are sure to be painted in the most gloomy colours before the eyes of Postulants, by men who are destitute of a truly religious spirit. If this picture should have the effect of turning them away from the Benedictine Order, then let those who do not wish to live under perpetual Superiors bear in mind that there are other Religious Bodies, the officials of which are not elected for life, and into these they may enter.\* Should none of these Religious Orders meet with their approval or should they be unable to satisfy their aspirations, then we feel sure that no one will attempt to deprive these men of that liberty which they prize so highly. They can stay in the world if they are so minded. Another grievance is that, in our Order, Superiors are elected to office by the Chapter-men. This enactment comes from the Holy Rule itself. It has been in force for many centuries. It has been confirmed by Pontifical authority. If it brought in its train all the perilous inconveniences with which it is credited, it would surely never be tolerated, nor would it ever have been established by St. Benedict who, as St. Gregory says, “was full of the spirit of all the just.” Therefore, we once again repeat : “He that is able to take it, let him take it.”

In addition to all this, we add from the works of the venerable Blosius, that celebrated passage in which he describes to the life what ought to be the character of the man who is thinking of entering our Order. This extract should be carefully read and reflected upon by all Postulants.

\* In the Anglo-Benedictine Congregation each Superior's term of office now expires at the end of eight years.

These are the words of the pious author: "If you desire to be admitted into fellowship with us, to live with us in our Monastery and there to serve Christ Our Lord, you must, first of all in your conduct, do what is commanded by Christ: 'He who wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his Cross daily and follow Me.' Therefore, if, for God's sake, you are prepared to abandon everything and truly to deny yourself; if you are ready, as far as in you lies, to give up your will and to curb your vicious inclinations and passions; if you will manfully renounce all the pomps, the pleasures, and the enticements of the world; if, with the help of God, you wish to lay aside all the glitter of pride and to take up whatever is lowly and simple; if, for the love of Christ, you will not refuse to endure rebukes, injurious treatment, trials and various other inconveniences of body and of mind; if you feel yourself disposed to bear these and similar crosses, you may, with confidence, take on yourself the monastic method of life, trusting for support from the most compassionate mercy of God. But, if you will not completely renounce yourself, it is not expedient for you, without the spirit of a Religious, to enter Religion. In the Monastery you will have to live, not by your own judgment but by another's judgment and in all things to manifest a spirit that is humbly obedient. Whenever, in the name of God and in accordance with that which is consonant with the dictates of Holy Religion, any command is imposed on you, you will have to carry it into effect, without either murmur or contradiction. When you desire to be at rest, you will probably be overburthened with labour; when you think that you will be promoted to honourable offices, you will be set to do the lowliest work; in short, when you wish to do either this or that, you will be told to do something of which you have not even thought. Therefore, in every circumstance in which you may find yourself placed, you must be ready to do the bidding of him who commands. Never, at any time, will you be able to say: 'I am ready to obey these orders, but I will not obey those.' You will have to obey in all things that are reasonably commanded and that

are neither evil in themselves nor contrary to your holy profession. In this breaking of your self-will and in this contradiction of your own personal inclinations, you will, it is true, suffer much tribulation and encounter many difficulties. At one time, the devil and your own unmortified flesh, at another, men who have not the fear of God in their hearts will urge you to murmur and to refuse; but, in spite of these, you must patiently persevere in carrying out your good purpose and in casting far from your mind these wicked suggestions. It will no longer be lawful for you to seek for superfluities and for delicacies; you cannot now permit yourself to indulge in the free and easy ways and in the other luxurious liberties of a worldly life; but leaving, once and for ever, its vanities and its dangerous amusements, and quitting the broad, smooth way of its votaries, you must, for the rest of your days, tread in the strait and difficult way of penance. You will be obliged to content yourself with the greatest simplicity both in food and in lodging; to endure the want of even necessary things; frequently to fast; always to preserve an inviolate chastity; to occupy yourself in prayer, in meditation, in holy reading; to be sparing in your words and studious of the laws of silence; to lead a life that is widely different from the life of persons who are living in the world; rarely to pass beyond the enclosure of the Monastery; to possess nothing, however insignificant it may be, as if it were your own; ever to strive after purity of heart; to seek only heavenly things; unweariedly both by day and by night, in heat and in cold, to assist at the Divine Office and to take part in the Divine Service; in fine, to cleave, in all things, to that which is becoming to the Religious Life and with prudent foresight to reject whatever is, in any way, contrary to its holy spirit. But if, at any time, abandoning the fear of God, you begin to lead a negligent life, and by your pride, your disobedience, your murmuring, and your contradictory spirit, to disturb Superiors and to be burthensome to the rest of the Brethren, understand that you will be most severely punished. However, let not these difficulties deter you



from embracing Religious Life; distrust yourself and put all your confidence in Our Lord Jesus Christ. He strengtheneth the weak, lifteth up those who are cast down, maketh the rough ways plain, and changeth into sweetness that which is bitter. That which to men seems impossible, He makes, by means of His divine grace, not only most easy, but most pleasant. He it is that hath said: 'Come to Me all ye that labour and that are heavily burthened and I will refresh you. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me because I am meek and humble of heart; for, My yoke is sweet and My burthen light.' The entrance to the way of salvation is, for the most part, narrow, full of sorrow and of difficulty; but, once that first step to the better land has been taken, the rest of the road is traversed with joy unutterable, because with every forward stride the love of God increases in the heart, and that heart is expanded with the ardour of charity which enables it to do and to suffer great things for God. To Him be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen."



## CHAPTER IV

### THE POSTULANT MUST TRULY SEEK GOD

WHEN, after serious deliberation, you have determined to give yourself to the service of God, in the Order of our holy Father St. Benedict or in the Order of any other Religious Founder, you must be careful to return most humble thanks to God for having conferred on you so singular a benefit. Very often and very fervently beseech Him Who has inspired you with the will to serve Him, to grant you the grace also to make that will efficacious. Beg of Him continually to preserve and to increase within you the love and the esteem which you already feel for the State to which He has called you. This is asking much from you, and yet it is not enough. For, in addition to this, you must live an exemplary life, such as an upright youth who is aspiring to Religion ought to lead, so that from your life, those who are around you will be able to see that your aim is to tread in the paths of perfection. To point out to you the best and easiest way to lead such a life as this while you are yet in the world, is the object of this little work. If, in compliance with its teaching, you endeavour to put in practice the lessons which it inculcates, you may confidently enter the path of Holy Religion with every prospect of reaching the much desired goal at which you aim.

In the preceding Chapter we explained the method which we consider to be the best for the accomplishment of this purpose, and, therefore, in the present one we will devote our attention to the consideration of the necessity which lies upon the Postulant for truly seeking God in the Religious life.

In the fifty-eighth Chapter of the Rule, our holy Lawgiver St. Benedict tells us that those who enter his Order must, above everything else, make the true and real search after God the primary end of their existence. Therefore, the main object in the life of any one that aspires to be a Benedictine, or, indeed, to be a Religious of any other Order, must be, with all his heart and with all his might, truly to seek God. If, before choosing St. Benedict's Order, he has already made this search the aim of his existence, he must continue to do so and must persevere, with ever-increasing fervour, in daily so doing.

Truly to seek God is nothing else than, in all things and by all things, to have a most pure intention of the greater glory of God, "that in all things God may be glorified."\* In this intention, our true happiness, our real glory, and our only beatitude, are to be found. Therefore, from this moment, offer yourself wholly to this supreme Lord of us all, and consecrate yourself to His honour and to His love. For His glory, let your words be uttered, and your thoughts be directed, and your works be performed. Be not satisfied with having with a good intention entered this State; it is furthermore required of you, not to do any action, either good or indifferent, without either actually or virtually referring it to the glory of God. The pleasure which this oblation gives to Him may be estimated from the words which Our divine Lord addressed to His beloved spouse, St. Gertrude: "If you take but one step, or pick up but one straw, or speak but one word, or do some friendly action to any one, or say for the dead, 'May they rest in peace,' or utter a prayer, for the just or for sinners, My goodness will accept it, if any of these acts be performed with a good intention." To make it quite clear that this promise was not given to St. Gertrude only, the Divine Spouse, in another place, says: "Whoever, while eating, or drinking, or when going to sleep, or while doing anything else of this nature, shall say in his heart or with his lips: 'O Lord! I accept this food, or, I accept anything else, with that love where-

\* *Regula*, cap. lvii.



with Thou didst sanctify this same object, when, in Thy holy humanity, Thou didst make use of it for the worship of Thy Father and for the salvation of the human race, in order that, in union with Thy divine love, it may procure an increase of joy to all the heavenly Spirits, to all the men on earth, to all the souls in Purgatory,'—on each of these occasions on which he accepts any convenience with some such intention, he puts before Me a kind of impenetrable shield, protected by which, I am defended from the various attacks which, by worldlings, are directed against Me."\* The Venerable Blossius illustrates this by an example: "If two friends walking together in a garden or in a field, see a little flower—the plucking or the not plucking of which is a matter of the utmost indifference—and yet the one, for God's sake, refrains from taking it, while the other, without any intention whatever, stoops and plucks it up, although this latter, by so doing, does not commit any sin, and although he is in other respects his companion's equal in grace and in merit, yet, for all eternity, the difference between the two in grace and in glory, in consequence of the good intention wherewith the one refrained from plucking the flower, will be as great as is the difference between heaven and earth; of such mighty import is it to do with a good intention even the most insignificant act."† In order to put this principle in practice, give heed to the following observations.

Let the care and the good intention with which you have determined to enter Religion be free from all self-seeking and from all worldly and earthly considerations. On this subject we have already spoken.‡ Pay particular attention to it; for, it is a matter of the greatest importance.

When you awake in the morning, direct your first thoughts to God and to Him offer and wholly consecrate both your-

\* *Instit.*, lib. iv., cap. 13.

† According to St. Thomas, such acts and merits receive from God an increase of only accidental glory, unless they are done with *intense* charity. When, however, these acts are accompanied by such a love as this, they receive an increase of essential glory. In the opinion of Suarez and of other theologians, the words of the text seem to be exaggerated.

‡ Chap. iii.

self and all that you possess. Our Lord used to say to St. Mechtilde: "Whoever, when rising in the morning, with his whole heart sighs unto Me and asks Me to make perfect all the works that he may do during the course of the day, so draws Me to himself by this act, that, as a body has life from the soul by which it is animated, so his soul has life from Me."\* By the mouth of the Wise Man, Eternal Wisdom promises that He will be found by those who, in the morning, watch for Him: "Blessed is the man that watcheth daily at my gates;† he that waketh early to seek me shall not labour; for, he shall find me sitting at his door;‡ he that watcheth for me shall embrace my sweetness."§ Now, although these words are capable of many other meanings, yet they may very aptly be applied to those persons who give to God the first fruits of their thoughts, especially at the beginning of each day, and desire to consecrate them to Him, by seeking Him with all sincerity. Our good God will never turn away His face from those who, from early dawn, strive to devote themselves to His service.

Besides this morning oblation of yourself and of your daily actions, you ought also, by means of an actual good intention, to offer up each particular act, both that which is in itself good, and that which is of its own nature indifferent. To do this is in strict accord with that injunction of the Apostle: "All whatsoever you do in word or in work, all things do ye in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God, and to the Father by Him."|| By using the word *all* he excepts nothing, and, therefore, all that you do, whether it is in itself holy, or is a matter of mere indifference, ought to be directed to the honour of Christ. The Wise Man inculcates this when he says: "In all thy works keep the pre-eminence."¶ But this pre-eminence is to be looked for, not so much in the excellence of the works which are performed, as in the excellent way in which each of them is done. Hence, this particular passage of Holy Writ does not command you to do excellent works, but to do your works

\* *Instit.*, lib. iv., cap. 29.

† *Prov.* viii. 34.

‡ *Wisd.* vi. 15.

§ *Ecclus.* iv. 13.

|| *Coloss.* iii. 17.

¶ *Ecclus.* xxxiii. 23.

in an excellent manner. But, to do excellently well your daily actions, there is required over and above an outwardly perfect manner, great uprightness of intention, by directing to the greater honour and glory of God whatever you may chance to do, and by never undertaking anything that aims at a mark lower than God Himself. This is nothing but the strictest justice; for, as we were created for God, and as He is our last end, any action performed by us that does not tend to Him is in a certain sense an unrighteous action. It is of no value, because it does not gain the end for which it ought to have been done. Nor must you be content with uprightness in your intention only; your works must be made still more pleasing and meritorious by being united to the works which Jesus did, and by being done with a desire on your part to accomplish for the honour of God far more than the little which you are actually able to effect. Moreover, you must, with most earnest supplication, pray the Divine Goodness to bring to a happy issue the work which you have undertaken, and to preserve you in its execution from spoiling it with defects arising from vain glory, impatience, weariness, and inattention.

All this will, perchance, seem to you to be full of difficulty. But do not shrink from undertaking it. Be not affrighted. Steadily persist in the work and you will learn by experience that what, in the beginning, was not without difficulty, in process of time will become not only easy, but even delightful, to say nothing of the vast stores of merit which you will be able to lay up for yourself by the assiduous repetition of these acts. It will contribute much to render this exercise easy, if you make yourself familiar with certain formulas which ought to be used at the beginning of each action and to be repeated with fervent affection many times during the course of the day. The following will give you some idea of what nature these formulas ought to be: "O Lord! incline unto mine aid. O Lord! make speed to help me! O God! my heavenly Father, in union with the merits and the works of my Lord Jesus Christ, I wish, for Thy sake, to rise," etc. Or again: "I offer to Thee, O heavenly Father!



in union with the merits and the works of Christ, this rising from bed," etc. Or again: "It is purely for Thy sake, O heavenly Father! that I rise, eat, recreate myself," etc. Father Lancisius, among other things, advises Postulants who wish to enter the Society of Jesus, mentally to offer to God every step that they take during the course of the day, saying: "For Thy sake, O Lord! for Thy sake."

Truly to seek God it is necessary to conceive a great horror and hatred of sin which withdraws you from God and hinders you from finding Him. This horror and this hatred of sin are matters of so grave moment that they deserve to be treated of in a separate chapter.

## CHAPTER V

### OF AVOIDING MORTAL SIN AS THE MOST HORRIBLE OF EVILS

#### SECTION I.

##### *Motives for avoiding Mortal Sin.*

ST. BENEDICT most earnestly exhorts his children never to be forgetful of themselves, always to be mindful of that which God has commanded, and to remember that those who condemn God fall into hell for their sins. Consequently, he implores them at all times to keep themselves free from sin and vice of thought, of word, of eyes, of hands, of feet, of self-will, and speedily to cut off the desires of the flesh. Thus ought he also to act, who at the call of God aspires to enter the Order of this loving Father or of any other Religious Founder; for, unless he does this there is grave reason to fear that he will be abandoned by our most merciful, but at the same time most just God Who sees all our actions, Who searches the reins and the heart, Who knows the thoughts of men. Being abandoned by God he will fall away from grace, and will, perhaps, lose the glory of everlasting life. Of this calamity there are on record many instances, of which, at the end of this Chapter, we will relate but two. These will serve to fill you with salutary fear, and, if they be thought over with prayerful attention, they will, with respect to sin, generate in your heart that supremely necessary horror and detestation which are the first germs of a better life.—

The *first motive* that we suggest to you for avoiding the guilt of mortal sin is one which Father Lancelius used to

put before the minds of young men who intended to enter Religion.\* Addressing them, it was his custom to say : “ If, heretofore, you have been in the habit of committing mortal sin, never again be guilty of it ; both because of those reasons which ought to withhold even secular persons who are never to be Religious, from the commission of it, and because you ought, while you are still living in the world, to try whether you are able to lead the life which Religious are bound to lead. They have as great a horror of mortal sin as they have of death itself ; and those among them who are farther advanced in perfection would prefer to be thrust into hell—if only they could there have the grace of God—rather than be guilty of a deadly sin which drives the grace of God from the soul.” A little farther on he says : “ I would never advise any persons to enter Religion that, for at least six months before so doing, had not abstained from the commission of any grievous sin, and that did not feel within themselves an assurance that they would never again be guilty of it.” His reason for saying this is given in the following words : “ Unless they are thus minded, either they do not persevere in Religion, or, if they do, they continue to offend God by their old habit of mortal sin and sometimes by new sins of quite a different character. As far as it is in their power to do so, they make the House of God a den of thieves ; they deprive themselves of those blessings which the Religious State brings to those who in it live religiously ; and not unfrequently they cover it with infamy, by public scandal or by open apostasy.” Still farther on, he says : “ I know that there have been some men of abandoned lives who, up to the very moment of their entrance into Religion, were entangled in the meshes of mortal sin and of long-standing evil habits ; and yet, as soon as they embraced the Religious State, were completely changed, and from that time forth, they led lives of angelic purity. But I have also known many others who, on this account, either immediately, or after a long time, have fallen away from their vocation. Why was this ? Simply and solely because they attempted

\* *Opusc. i., cap. 7.*



in Religion to observe the Evangelical Counsels without having first endeavoured in the world to keep the Commandments of God. They tried to do that which is impossible—to construct a lofty fabric of sanctity without having first laid down the solid foundations on which it is to stand. By omitting to do this, they did not comply with an indispensable condition which nothing else than a miracle of grace can supply. Therefore, if in Religion you wish to lead a life altogether free from the afore-mentioned scandals, dangers, and grave sins, a life safe from the disgrace which invariably is fastened on it in consequence of these disorders and from eternal damnation which is their ultimate punishment, with all the power of your soul flee from and detest mortal sin, while you are still living in the world. For, as St. Thomas says: ‘The practice of the precepts during a life spent in the world, prepares one for the better observance of the counsels during a life passed in Religion. But, an evil habit of sin contracted during a life in the world, is a grave hindrance to the leading of a good life in the Religious State.’ ”\* Therefore, if you have ever, during your past life, mortally offended God, firmly resolve, after having blotted out your sins by a sorrowful confession, never again, on any consideration whatever, to offend the divine Goodness and henceforth to pass your time in the faithful service of the Lord of Majesty.

A *second motive* is the special favour granted to you by God, in giving you a call to the Religious State. Besides the countless benefits which you share in common with other men, He has conferred on you very many particular marks of His loving kindness, of which marks this divine vocation is one that is granted but to one out of ten hundred thousand. Will you, then, after these considerations, dare to insult your Benefactor, to oppose His all-holy will, to trample His Law under your feet? To do so would be an insufferable act of ingratitude. “A shuddering horror, accompanied by consternation of mind, rushes in upon me,” says St. Basil, “when I contemplate the benefits which God

\* *Opusc.* xvii., cap. 6.

has showered on us, and then reflect that, in return for them, He does not ask for our thanks, but only for our love. I am filled with a well-grounded dread that, unless I comply with His request, I shall be rejected by God and shall become a subject of shame to Jesus Christ.”\* But, if so great a Saint was filled with horror, lest, notwithstanding the graces and the favours wherewith God had enriched him, he should become a disgrace unto Christ, by giving himself up to the pursuit of sinful vanities, with how much greater reason ought you to dread the commission of any grievous sins, you who, in addition to your many other spiritual advantages, have received from God a call to the Religious State? Not only you would become an occasion of disgrace unto Christ, but you would load Him, as far as it is in your power to do so, with contumelious insults, and would crucify again unto yourself the Son of God, and make of Him a mockery.†

Our good God, by calling you to the Religious State, is preparing to enrol you among the members of His household; for, of Religious it may with truth be said that they are the “domestics of God.” Will you then dare, by the guilt of mortal sin, to expel God from the house of your soul? Will you so far forget your allegiance as to give admission to His and your most implacable foes? Will you be so utterly foolish as, of your own accord, to subject and to bind yourself to these fell murderers? Yet, what else do you do when you sin? St. Augustine says: “He who accepts any temporal gratification as the reward of his faithlessness to God, sells his soul to the devil.”‡ It was on account of acts such as these that our Lord thus complained to St. Bridget: “In these days I am wholly forgotten and neglected. I am like a deposed monarch, to fill whose throne the people choose a rapacious robber and load him with honours. It is My will that My throne should be in the heart of man. Over him I ought to reign as King and Lord, because I made him and redeemed him from the destruction which was his due. But now he has violated the plighted word which in baptism he gave to Me. He has contemned the laws which I drew up for

\* *Regula fusius.*

† *Heb. vi. 6.*

‡ *In Epist. ad Rom.*

his guidance. He has chosen to do his own will and has refused to give ear to Me. Moreover, he prefers a robber to Me; he gives his allegiance to Satan who is in very deed a robber, because he steals from Me the souls of those whom I have redeemed with My precious blood." God grant that you may never be guilty of perfidy such as this.

The *third motive* is that he who enters the Religious State needs the special blessing of God, not only rightly to begin that holy method of life, but worthily to persevere in it till the last day of his earthly pilgrimage. Therefore, he ought not to anger God by adding fresh sins to those which he has already committed; for, these new offences turn aside the blessing of God, call down His curse, and put an obstacle in the way of grace which is so necessary for us. To these words particular attention ought to be paid by those persons who, while still living in the world, deliberately put themselves in the occasions of sin, because they imagine that, after their reception of the Religious habit, they will lead a holy life and pass the rest of their days in doing penance for the excesses of their youth. Let each of those who deceive themselves by this egregiously illogical assumption ask himself the plain question: "Whence will come the force or power by which I shall be able to do this? Will it come from myself or from God? It cannot come from myself, because Jesus Christ has said: 'Without Me you can do nothing'; and St. Paul: 'We are not able to think anything of ourselves as of ourselves, but our ability comes from God.'" If you bear in mind your complete dependence on God for the power to do good, you will easily conclude that the best way to obtain the divine assistance is not by grossly injuring, contemning, trampling under foot, and so far as in you lies slaying Him Who is able to bestow that power upon you. Is it likely that any man would grant a favour to him who, in his very presence, insults and flouts and sets him at naught? Therefore, if you purpose to lead a good and holy life in Religion, be careful while you are yet engaged in secular pursuits to make strenuous efforts to win the grace



and the blessing of Him "from Whom every good and perfect gift descends."

Terrible is the punishment which God inflicts on those who are ungrateful to Him for the divine vocation which he has bestowed on them, and who fear not to outrage Him by one or by many mortal sins. Sometimes it is by temporal misfortunes, at others by eternal torments, that He vindicates the honour of His insulted majesty. We will bring forward only two examples of the divine justice, that those who chance to read these pages may be filled with saving fear, and that they may learn, at the expense of another, never to imperil their eternal salvation. A young Spanish gentleman, who had made up his mind to enter Religious Life, was tempted by the devil to indulge in every species of unholy pleasure before bidding adieu to the world. He yielded to the seductions of the enemy, and in the gratification of his unruly passions utterly forgot the call which he had received to higher and nobler things. Instead of turning away from the broad and even way which leads to hell, as he had at first intended, he now determined to serve the flesh rather than the spirit. While he was rushing madly onward in his infamous course, the hand of God struck him with a grievous malady which chained him down on a bed of pain. Day by day the evil increased in virulence. His parents, his friends, his director, seeing his danger, united their exhortations, urging him to confess his sins and prepare for the worst. But to no purpose! Not only he would not listen to them, but in return for their charitable solicitude for his eternal welfare he loaded them with reproaches. In the meantime, the shadow of death fell on him; his strength hourly decreased; his hearing partly failed; his sight grew dim; but no sign of repentance came from him. His weeping parents, his sorrowing friends prayed and besought him to turn to God. While they were saying: "Let thine ears be attentive to the voice of our supplication, behold Our Saviour from the Cross stretches out His arms to embrace thee," the dying man stopped his ears in order to shut out these supplications and hinder them from reaching his

intelligence. Then, in a voice full of horror he cried out : "Because I have called, and thou hast refused to listen, I also will laugh at thy destruction." With these terrible words on his lips, he breathed forth his soul.

The sad fate of this youth may well fill us with terror. It gives us an unmistakable proof of the imminent risk of damnation incurred by those persons who, after receiving from God a call to aspire to better things, venture to taste of worldly pleasures. Had this wretched youth abstained from raising the fatal cup to his lips, the probability is that he would neither have lost the grace of his vocation, nor have made so unhappy an end.

Even more tragical was the fate of a certain young Austrian nobleman who, as it was afterwards ascertained, had preserved his innocence untarnished even until the last night of his life. At College, he was to all his schoolfellows a model of the greatest purity and innocence. As he had determined to enter the Religious State, his father made a great feast on the day before the youth was to depart to put this resolve into execution. His friends were invited to rejoice with him and to bid him "God-speed." Everything went off to the satisfaction of all and the guests departed to their homes. On the following morning, the young man when called made no reply to the words of the person who went to awake him. This silence alarmed his parents, and, when no answer was returned to their own repeated knocking, they ordered the door of his room to be burst open. This was done. They then entered his chamber, went to his bedside, and discovered, to their horror, that he was dead! The bereaved father himself carried the tidings of the sad event to the holy priest who had been his son's professor and besought him to pray for the child, that, if he had passed from this world with any stains of sin upon his soul, they might speedily be washed away. The priest received the news with unfeigned sorrow; but rejoiced that heaven had, on that day, welcomed one other Saint within her gates. "Your darling child's singular innocence of life," said he to the father, "might well dispense with any

suffrages offered up for the repose of his soul. Nevertheless, I will celebrate for him the Holy Sacrifice, that God may be moved all the sooner to wipe away any slight stain that may, perchance, detract somewhat from the dazzling brightness of his purity and retard his entry into heaven." He straightway proceeded to the sacristy to vest, but as soon as he had opened the door, it was shut violently in his face. Once again he essayed to push it open, when it was once more closed by an invisible force which it seemed impossible to resist. Filled with an involuntary fear, the priest cried out: "I adjure you in the name of Christ, tell me who you are, whence you are, and wherefore you have come hither!" "Ah, Father!" said a sorrowful voice, "I am the soul of your scholar who died last night!" "Do you ask for assistance," inquired the priest; "and, if so, in what way shall we be able to give it you?" "Alas!" replied the youth, "you cannot aid a soul that is lost for ever!" "What!" exclaimed the horror-stricken priest; "is it possible that you are in hell!—you, who were an example of every virtue!" "Yes," answered the youth, "I am in hell! Till yesterday, I kept unstained the grace which I had received in baptism. After supping heartily, I retired to rest, weary with dancing and filled with thoughts far different from those wherewith I used to occupy myself. I passed in review the worldly pleasures of which I had already heard so much. I began to consider what manner of delight there is in what is called carnal pleasure, and I resolved to taste, upon the following day, of this forbidden fruit, before I quitted the world for ever. Led on by these thoughts into the proximate occasion of sin, I yielded to temptation, and died before I had time either to be sorry for or to confess this my first and last sin."

Into some of the particulars of this sad story let us now inquire with more minute detail. This youth was a mirror of innocence and of uprightness even to the last day of his life, and yet, for the single sin of one evil thought, consented to after the reception of the grace of a divine vocation, he lost his vocation, his life, and his eternal beatitude! What are



the thoughts which this terrible judgment causes to arise in your mind? Have you never, up to the present moment, stained your soul with a more grievous transgression than was that of this unhappy young man? If you have never sinned, then thrice happy are you! But beware! See that you never, at any time, are guilty of any grave offence against God! For, after the example which you have just read, who knows whether your first sin may not be your last, for which there will be no time to repent! But, if your conscience reproaches you with having committed either one sin or many grave sins, be very much afraid that, if you add yet one other to those of which you have already been guilty, you may thereby block up the way of eternal life and put in it an impassable barrier which will shut you out from the kingdom of heaven. In the next place, observe the various steps by which the wretched youth came at last to his fatal fall. He partook of a sumptuous feast before bidding the world farewell; he engaged in a dance with others; sated with the good things of the feast and wearied with worldly amusement, he retired to rest, but without filling his mind with those holy thoughts wherewith he was accustomed to occupy it; the memory of certain carnal pleasures of which he had occasionally heard, returned to his mind; he began to consider what is the nature of carnal pleasure and to dwell on the idea of it. Finally, he resolved to have an experimental knowledge of it before he for ever bade adieu to the world, and he was induced to make this experiment by the thought that he would have the chance of expiating this sin by means of confession. Behold the ways which seem to men to be right, or, at least, not to be evil, ways of which the end leads to temporal and to eternal death, unless, indeed, we walk with exceeding great caution through them. If you give heed to that which we teach, you will altogether turn away from some of these ways; through others you will walk with great circumspection, lest perchance you should dash your foot against a stone, on which, if you fall, you will be bruised; but, if it fall on you, it will grind you to powder.

After we have laid before you a few extracts from the Rule of St. Benedict, in each of which extracts you will find a motive for avoiding mortal sin, we will, in another Section, treat of the ways which lead to deadly sins. From these ways, those who aspire to the Religious Life must be careful to turn aside, with as great horror as they would from the sins themselves unto which these ways lead.

## SECTION II.

### *Motives for Avoiding Mortal Sin, drawn from St. Benedict's Rule.*

As a supreme hatred and detestation of mortal sin constitute the first principles of a holy life, we consider that our labour will be spent in vain unless we succeed in implanting deeply in the minds of those who read these pages a thorough aversion from this greatest of evils. With this end in view, we will quote from the Holy Rule certain passages in which St. Benedict suggests to his children various motives to deter them from the commission of sin and to induce them to accept the sweet yoke of Our Lord's Commandments.

(1) In the Prologue to his Rule our great Lawgiver in the following words points out to us the *first motive* : "That He Who hath now vouchsafed to reckon us in the number of His children may not hereafter be saddened by our evil deeds." It was, then, at the time when you merited to receive Him by faith that Our Lord first deigned mercifully to reckon you among the number of His children. Or, as St. John puts it : "But as many as received Him He gave them power to be made the sons of God."\* Afterwards you were adopted into the number of His children by an altogether new and singular manifestation of His fatherly compassion, when, through the grace of your vocation, you resolved to leave the world and to obey the voice of Christ, speaking to you and saying : "Hearken, O my son ! and see, and incline thy ear, and forget thy people and thy father's

\* St. John i. 12.

house.”\* What a condescension on the part of the Eternal Father! “We deserve not,” says Smaragdus, commenting on this passage, “to be reckoned among the number of His servants; and yet He deigns to count us among the number of His children. Great is the dignity bestowed upon us, that whereas we are children of wrath and sinners from our very childhood, we are mercifully called to be sons and heirs of God, heirs indeed of God, and co-heirs with Christ.” This, then, is that merciful and most loving Father Whom you sadden when you fall into grievous sin. God forbid that you should ever again wring with sorrow the heart of One Who so tenderly loves you.

(2) The *second motive* is contained in the following words of the Prologue: “We must at all times so serve Him with the goods which He hath bestowed on us, that He may neither as an angry Father disinherit us His children, nor as a dread Lord, exasperated by our offences, deliver us up to perpetual punishment as wicked servants who would not follow Him to glory.” Here you have given to you a twofold motive for avoiding sin. The first is the fear of losing your paternal inheritance; the second is the dread of incurring an everlasting punishment. Therefore, if by the sweet name “Father” and by the filial dread of piercing with sorrow that Father’s heart, you are not moved to abstain from the commission of evil, let the well-grounded fear of losing your birthright withhold you from evil ways. Oh! if you were but truly wise, if you did but clearly understand how great a good is this your paternal inheritance, we have no hesitation in saying that you would make a most efficacious resolution never again to offend your loving Father, but, by obeying Him in all things, to shield yourself from the direful evil of losing your eternal heritage. This heritage is styled by the Prince of the Apostles, “incorruptible, undefiled, unfading, reserved for us in heaven.”† Who, then, will be so foolish as to esteem it of less value than are the frail, fleeting joys of this world? How wretched was Esau who, for a mess of pottage, sold his birthright! At the time, he counted that

\* Ps. xliv. 11.

† 1 Peter i. 4.



birthright of little worth, but afterwards, when he perceived by the blessing bestowed on Jacob, that it had been taken away from him, he was seized with a sorrow so vehement that, as the Scripture expresses it, "he roared out with a great cry, and being in a great consternation lamented and wept."\* Of a truth there are many who have imitated Esau by depriving themselves of their heavenly dower for a vile, momentary, and most disgraceful pleasure. These men will lament without hope of consolation and will roar out with a great cry when, alas ! time shall be no longer. That so grievous a calamity may never befall you, and that you may never be compelled, with fruitless wailing, to lament your folly, look well to your eternal interests while you have time. Do not provoke to wrath your most loving Father, but, by every means in your power, strive to prove yourself a docile and obedient child.

Now, although we have not any doubt whatever but that the foregoing considerations have made you resolve altogether to flee from and to detest sin, yet if your mind is of so slavish a temper as not to be moved by that which we have already said, there is yet another motive which cannot fail to fill you with horror: "Lest as a dread Lord, exasperated by your offences, He deliver you up to perpetual punishment as a wicked servant who would not follow Him to glory." What salutary fear ought these words to inspire into any heart that is not altogether hardened and that does not condemn the future life of bliss ! That Great Being Who, before our commission of sin, ever shows Himself to be a most loving Father and frequently calls us as most dear children to accept the splendid inheritance which He offers to us, as soon as we stain ourselves with the guilt of sin, is justly provoked and moved to indignation by our audacity. He is able in a moment to consign us to the flames of hell as worthless servants who, despising every mark of fatherly love bestowed on them, do not hesitate to brave the wrath of the Omnipotent.

(3) From the same Prologue the *third motive* is taken :

\* Gen. xxvii. 34.

“Therefore, the days of our life are prolonged for the amendment of our evil deeds, according to these words of the Apostle : ‘ Knowest thou not that the patience of God leadeth thee to repentance.’ ” Therefore, if the days of our life are lengthened, in order to afford us time for doing penance, has not he who, by oft-repeated offences, presumes to wear out the patience of God, good reason to fear that, at the moment when he least expects it, the Lord will cut the thread of life and force him, fruitlessly and for ever, to weep over those grievous sins which he would not wash away during the time mercifully granted for repentance, sins which he dared to augment by multiplied transgressions? For this reason the Apostle, immediately after the words quoted by St. Benedict, adds : “ But according to thy hardness, and impenitent heart, thou treasurest up to thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the just judgment of God.” Commenting on this passage, Menochius says : “ On that dreadful day, Christ the just Judge will make manifest before the eyes of all, the thoughts and the works of men. He will judge them with divine justice. He will show the gravity of the sin by the punishment which is due to it.” St. Gregory, explaining the words of Job : “ God hath given him place for penance, and he abuseth it unto pride,”\* says : “ He who sins, and who, after his sin, is suffered to breathe the breath of life, is thus mercifully tolerated, in order that he may withhold himself, for the future, from all iniquity. But he who, though patiently borne with, yet does not abandon his iniquitous courses, only the more closely binds himself in the bonds of guilt, by accepting the favour of God’s long-suffering mercy. At the last day, the most just Judge will reckon as heinous offences all these tokens of His mercy ; because the sinner employed these gracious favours, bestowed for the purpose of leading him to repentance, only to assist himself to persevere in his career of sin. Therefore, when any one perceives that God is patiently awaiting his return to better ways, he ought to consider that these delays of divine justice are so many

\* Cap. xxiv. 23.

indubitable signs of his future damnation. The present forbearance of the Judge will but add to the punishment and intensify the pain which are awaiting the sinner. Even the means which might be used to snatch him from eternal death, become the occasional causes which will the more surely thrust him into it.”\* These words may well strike terror into every soul. The more surely to fix in the minds of his children the motive which they convey, St. Benedict, in the seventh chapter of the Rule, in almost identical words, exhorts them to flee from and to detest sin, saying: “We must always take heed, Brethren, lest, as the Prophet saith in the Psalm: God, at some time, should look down from heaven and behold us gone aside to evil and become unprofitable; and, though He spare us for the present, because being merciful He expecteth our conversion, He may hereafter say to us: These things thou hast done, and I have held My peace.”† Explaining this passage, Smaragdus says: “To be silent, not to render evil for evil, but for a long time to await the sinner, in order that he may repent, is the usual way of God’s dealing with him. If God were to take summary vengeance on him for his wickedness, God would not be silent; He would answer the sinner. But, if that man for whom God waits a long time, in order that he may have the leisure to repent, does not return from his evil ways, God on a sudden strikes him; but then it is that the sinner may perish for ever.” Weigh well these words; and if you are one of those who, by their sins, are bold enough to go on offending God, you have good reason to fear that the words of the Commentator will be verified in your person. When you think that you are most secure, the Lord God will summon you to the bar of divine justice, there to receive your well-merited chastisement.

(4) From the seventh chapter St. Benedict draws a *fourth motive* for avoiding grievous sin. It is expressed in these words: “Remember that those who contemn God fall into hell for their sins.” If by means of serious and oft-repeated

\* *Moralia*, lib. xvi.

† *Reg.*, cap. 7, grad. 1.



meditation you were to go down into that place of torment prepared for those who set at naught the God of supreme Majesty, with what a shuddering horror would your soul be filled, and how salutary would be the resolutions which you would make carefully to avoid all occasions of sin ! It would effect in you that which a vision of hell effected in the case of Hugo, Prince of Tuscany. This youth, caressed by all the flattering blandishments of great prosperity and ensnared in all those deceitful meshes with which sin entangles the feet of the young and inexperienced, plunged headlong into every kind of vice. Although warned by a marvellous apparition of our Blessed Lady to quit his evil courses and to return to a better method of life, he paid no attention to the admonition of her for whom, with an astonishing inconsistency, he ever preserved, even in the midst of his licentious career, a most tender and filial devotion. While living in this reckless way, it happened that as he was one day hunting, he was overtaken by a violent thunder-storm. He sought shelter from its fury in a cave hard by the place in which he chanced to be engaged in the chase. As he crept into the dark recesses of this cavern, Almighty God vouchsafed to present before his eyes a vision which eventually led to his conversion and to the salvation of his soul. It seemed to him that there glared before him a great furnace, round which stood workmen engaged in some metallic handicraft. But as he looked he perceived with horror that they drew forth from the roaring fire the lacerated members of human bodies. Heads, arms, thighs, and legs were all taken to the anvil and there beaten with the smith's hammer as if they were flaming iron which was to be fashioned into any shape that it might suit the design of the workers to make. Thinking that he had come unawares upon an impious gang of magicians and necromancers against whom he had proved himself an implacable foe, he began to pour out against them the most awful threats of vengeance. Scarcely had he ceased to speak, when one of them, turning on him with a terrible scowl, cried out : " Softly, softly, friend ; we are not, as you suppose us to be, magicians and necromancers. We

are the ministers of divine justice. This is the way in which we deal with the unclean hunters after carnal pleasures, when the hand of God consigns these wretches to our care. At present we are daily expecting the arrival of a certain Hugo, the master of this place. If he should come into our power, he shall expiate on this anvil all the abominations of his licentious life." This vision proved a most effectual remedy for the lustful fever which had burnt out Hugo's spiritual life; for, mounting his horse, he rode away quite a different man from what he had been. In all earnestness he set about the task of trying to escape so horrible a fate and for this purpose resolved to begin by a general and public confession of his sins. On a day which had been fixed by him he came to the Cathedral church, walking between the Archbishop of Ravenna and Eustachius, Archbishop of Turin. There, in the presence of a great multitude gathered together by the strangeness of the event, he fell on his knees and cried aloud: "I will no longer be Hugo." This resolve he accomplished to the very letter by putting off the old man and by clothing himself in the new, who is created by God in the holiness of justice and of truth.

Mark well the words: "I will no longer be Hugo," in order that if you have heretofore followed his example by straying from the path of God's Commandments, you may now, after a serious consideration of the torments of hell, imitate him in his repentance, and efficaciously resolve no longer to be that which heretofore you have been. It is to this that you are invited by St. Benedict, in the words by which he places before you the fourth motive for avoiding mortal sin. But if, owing to the special providence of God, you have up to the present time been preserved from any grave offence against His infinite holiness, be very much afraid that if you were now to commit but one such sin, you would straightway be condemned to eternal torments. Oh, if many had but seriously reflected on these considerations, they would not now be burning in the unquenchable flames of hell!

(5) *Fifth motive.* "Let him think that he is always beheld from heaven by God; and that all his actions, wheresoever

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Xet 8  
p 65

he may be, lie open before the eye of God." \* The wonderful conversion of an infamous harlot, a conversion of which mention is made by Surius, in his life of St. Ephrem, proves to us the power which this motive has to shield the soul from sin. It seems that a wretched woman one day solicited the Saint to gratify the lusts of the flesh. In order to open her eyes to the infamy of her position, he at once pretended to assent to her proposal, on condition that she would sin in the public market-place of the city. "Oh no," said she, "there I should be seen by the people, and the disgrace which would fall on me would cover me with eternal confusion." Then turning to her, the Saint replied: "If you think that the fact of being seen by men is sufficient to shame you from this deed, do you not fear, are you not in dread of the eyes of the Lord Who sees all things, both those that are done in secret and those that are done in public? Will you not withhold yourself from doing evil in the presence of Him Who stirs up within us the accusing voice of conscience and can make it punish us for all eternity with its stinging reproaches?" These few words sufficed to extinguish the fire of lust in the bosom of this wretched creature, to release her from the slavery of sin, and to cause her to change the evil courses which she had been pursuing, for the rough and rugged paths of a penitential life. Casting herself at the feet of the Saint, she implored pardon for her manifold sins and besought him to be her guide, that she might never again wander from the way of salvation, on which she then set her feet. He promised that which she asked and not only gave her wise precepts to instruct her mind, but placed her in a Monastery in which holy women cared for her with all compassionate tenderness and charity. Thus did he lead to the gates of heaven one who had attempted to conduct him to the gates of hell. What was it that withheld Joseph from committing the crime to which he was tempted? What was it that made Susannah prefer death rather than yield to the wishes of the reprobates who strove to rob her of her chastity?

\* *Reg.*, cap. 7, grad. 1.



It was the consciousness of the presence of the ever-watchful eye of God. For, when she saw that she must choose either life with dishonour, or death, with shame, indeed, before men, but with glory before God, she boldly said : " It is better for me to fall into your hands than to sin in the sight of the Lord."\* Imitate the example of these two reverential worshippers of God's presence, and you also will learn by experience how efficacious is the support with which mindfulness of that presence furnishes the soul, to enable it to escape the snares of sin. " If," says St. Chrysostom, " we are loth to sin before our fellow-men and are careful to do nothing unbecoming our dignity when even our servants are looking on, consider how powerful a check it will be on us, if we ever keep before our minds the fact that we are never, for a single instant, out of the presence of God's all-seeing eye."† " Who is there," asks St. Basil, " that will either entertain an evil thought, or will do an evil deed, if he believe that God is in every place and that He is present at every action ?" It is only when men assume either that God is not looking at them, or that He cares not for the deeds which they do, that they are bold enough to proceed to the commission of crimes. " The eyes of the Lord," saith Ecclesiasticus, " are far brighter than is the sun, beholding round about all the ways of men, and the bottom of the deep, and looking into the hearts of men, into the most hidden parts."‡

We think that these thoughts, prayerfully revolved in the mind, will carry with them weight sufficient to urge you to flee from and to detest sin. Therefore, passing over many other motives which might be brought forward in addition to those which we have just placed before you, we will now point out to you the ways and the occasions which lead to sin, in order that knowing what they are, you may, with all care and earnestness, endeavour to avoid them. He who will not do this, is quite ignorant of the malice of mortal sin ; he does not detest it with that loath-

\* *Daniel* xiii. 23.

† St. Chrys., *Hom.* iv., *In Epist. ad Rom.*

‡ *Ecclus.* xxiii. 28.

ing and that hatred with which he ought to turn away from everything that might lead him into this, the greatest of human ills.

SECTION III.

*Not only sin itself, but the ways and the occasions which lead to it, must be carefully avoided.*

The illustrious Father Lancisius of the Society of Jesus, in one of his spiritual works describes the five ways which lead to sin. All these, from the very fact of being occasions of evil, are themselves evil. Therefore, they must be carefully avoided by those who are thinking of embracing the Religious State. As the book in which he treats of them is not in the hands of many, and as it would be wearisome to transcribe whole pages from it, it will suit our purpose far better if we treat of these ways in a manner which will harmonise with the general tenor of this little work.

(1) The first way that, as a rule, leads men into sin is converse with those who are themselves sinners. These by the bad example of their own evil lives, by their obscene talk, and, worse still, by their advice and counsel, incite others to the commission of sin. They impel them to drunkenness. They introduce them to society which either is absolutely immoral, or is, at least, of so disreputable a character, that no one who cares for the purity of his soul would have any intercourse with it. They take them to dancing parties, to questionable theatrical representations, to places of public resort in which, without any necessity, they are forced by the very circumstances of the case, to mingle with, to look at, and to converse with women. It is but reasonable, therefore, to expect that he who is thinking of entering Religion will studiously keep aloof from the company of men of this stamp, even if, by so doing, he should give them mortal offence. To act thus is to do only what St. Benedict himself did. Writing of him, St. Gregory says: "When he was sent to Rome to study Humanities, and when he saw how many of his school-fellows were leading

dissolute lives, he drew back the foot which he had set, as it were, on the threshold of the world, lest by the evil conversation of those who were around him, he also should fall into that dangerous and godless gulf. Therefore, giving over his books and forsaking his father's house and wealth, with a mind resolved to serve God only, he sought for some place in which he might accomplish his holy purpose."\*

Speaking of this heroic act, Clavenau says: "It was not without fear that St. Benedict lived amid his unruly fellow-students. For, he had good reason to be in dread, lest any taint of the unclean herd of sinners among whom his lot was cast should dim the brightness of his own virginal purity. Those who like these, are vicious, idle scapegraces, take counsel together and mature their plans of wickedness as they sit in the taverns, chasing away sobriety, indulging in gluttonous excesses, and striving to surpass one another in the depth of their potations. In their midst, shameless women may be seen, smiling with drunken leer at one, caressing another, and inflaming the hearts of all with the fire of lust. No one that is pure of heart can pass by, without being filled with shame. His blush of offended modesty is the signal for an outburst of derisive laughter. Only the unclean are received with acclamations of delight.

How bitterly, in his *Confessions*, does St. Augustine lament over the incalculable harm which the companionship of the wicked had wrought in his own soul! They gloried in their shame, and they were so openly licentious in his presence that he blushed because he was not so shameless as they were.† In imitation of St. Benedict, whose Order, or that of any other Founder, you desire to enter, resolve from this moment to please God only. Despise and quit the company of those who have been, or who actually are unto you an occasion of offending God. Be afraid lest the weakness of youth should beguile you into sin, and lest the plague which goes forth from the company and the conversation of the wicked should infect your soul and drag you down into the grave of sin.

\* *Dialog.*, lib. ii.

† *Lib. ii.*, cap. 19.



(2) A second way leading to mortal sin is all unnecessary and curious contemplation of corporeal beauty, no matter whether it is the corporeal beauty of man or of woman. Oh, how many on this rock have made miserable shipwreck of their virtue! It is to hinder you from suffering a similar disaster that we offer you an infallible preservative in the example of St. Benedict. It seems, as St. Gregory tells us, that the image of someone whom he had seen, very probably while he was at school in Rome, was once again, by the cunning of the devil, presented to his imagination. The vivid picture of her beauty which that most skilful artist was able to conjure up before his mental vision, was so enchanting, and it kindled in his bosom so great a fire of passion that, for a moment, the idea of quitting his solitude flashed through his brain. Now, observe, as St. Vincent Ferrer, in his Sermon on St. Benedict, is careful to point out, that although this most holy youth was then in the flower of his age, yet his bodily frame was well-nigh dead and cold by reason of the rigorous course of austerity to which he had subjected it. The lengthened vigil, the gnawing fast, and the piercing chill of his mountain cavern had done their work. Yet, even in one so apparently dead to all fleshly lusts, that single spark shot forth from his memory was enough to enkindle so fierce a conflagration that the thought of for ever throwing up the celestial life which he had so heroically begun to lead, was suggested to his mind. "What think you of this," exclaims Father Clavenau, writing on this incident, "you who, with a stare so bold, so impudent, fix your lascivious eyes on every object and print on your imagination every line of beauty that you are able to discover? Nothing escapes your eagle glance; you pluck every flower that blooms; you inhale the perfume of every garden that is in blossom. St. Benedict passed his days in the depths of a vast solitude, with naught but rugged, barren rocks to meet his gaze; and yet a seemingly insignificant trifle was the occasion in his soul of a tumult so fierce, so overmastering, as almost to drive him away from the service of God. You, however, live in the midst of populous

cities; on every side you are compassed by your fellow-men; and yet you have no fear for the grace of God, which is in peril so imminent. Benedict's flesh was tamed into submission; the fire of passion in it was well-nigh extinct; his food was of the simplest; his drink was water from the lake hard by. But you are full of lusty life; your fare is rich and succulent; your drink is luscious wine which pours a very stream of liquid fire through your youthful veins. When Benedict was weary, the unyielding rock received his aching limbs; a couch of down awaits you when you seek repose. No other sound fell on his ears than the wind whistling through the mountain pines. But in your ears syren voices sing enchanting strains. Yet, this Saint of God, in consequence of having once gazed upon a beautiful woman, was enveloped in a tempestuous storm of evil imaginations, the violence of which almost wrecked the vessel of his soul. Does your chastity sleep secure, though circled with a glittering array of armed foes, all eager to rob you of your treasure and to murder your soul? If this happened in the greenwood, what will happen in the dry?"\* Should these words of Father Clavenau's fall like well-merited reproaches on the ear of your conscience, look well to yourself and set your house in order; otherwise, in your case also, may come to pass that which the Prophet, in another sense, laments as a calamity which had happened to himself: "My eye hath wasted my soul."†

(3) The third way which leads to sin is reading, in prose or in verse, books which treat of matters that are obscene. Among these books you must reckon all those novels which, under the thin gauze of conventional love-making, endeavour to conceal the hideous skeleton of carnal sin; all anatomical and medical works that deal with the various parts of the human frame and with the diseases by which they are affected. These last-named books are particularly objectionable, because they are usually illustrated by plates which are oftentimes more dangerous to the reader than is the letter-press itself. You will easily understand how displeasing to

\* *St. Luke* xxiii. 31.

† *Lament.* iii. 51.

God is the perusal of all such productions as these, if you recall to mind what happened, in his early youth, to the illustrious St. Odo. As he was one day preparing to read Virgil, he fell asleep and dreamt that he was tortured with burning thirst. As he hastened to slake the fire inwardly consuming him, some one presented to his lips a most costly vessel; but, as he was about to drain it to the dregs, he perceived, with horror, that it was filled with hissing serpents. Starting back, in his alarm, he awoke, and perceived that it was only a dream; but a dream that had come as a warning from God. Taking it as such, he determined, from that time forth, to devote himself to the study of the Sacred Book. Now, if an over-great eagerness to read Virgil, whose poetry is so chaste that he is called the *Virgin*, was visited by God with so severe a reproof, with what wrath must He look on those who gloat over the impure pages of authors who, in vivid colours, picture before them enormities and vices such as were those which now lie buried under the waters of the Dead Sea? Therefore, abstain from reading such works. Avoid them as you would avoid dishonour and death. The poison which they instil into the mind is sweet as honey to the taste, but it is keen and venomous as a serpent's tooth to destroy the life of the soul. Imitate St. Odo, and, as St. Benedict says: "Willingly give ear to holy reading."\* In fact, as far as you can do so without interfering with other duties suitable to your state, devote yourself wholly to the study of the Sacred Book.

(4) The fourth way leading to mortal sin is idleness. This must be shunned with the greatest care; for, as St. Benedict tells us: "Idleness is an enemy of the soul."† Explaining this sentence of our holy Father's Rule, Cardinal Turrecremata cites the following testimonies: "St. Bernard, in his treatise *De Consideratione*, says: 'Idleness must be avoided, because it is a most tender nursing-mother of all that is frivolous and trifling, but a hard, pitiless stepmother of all that is serious and virtuous. More than any other vice, it has the trick of tripping up the heels of the mightiest

\* *Reg.*, cap. iv., Instr. 56.

† *Reg.*, cap. xlviii.



men and of plunging them headlong into crimes of the blackest dye. Why is this? Because it strangles virtue, nourishes pride, and paves the way to hell.'

"The philosopher Seneca says of idleness: 'There are men whose bodily frame does not work any harm, and yet their idle mind hurries them on to the commission of a thousand mad crimes. It is idleness that is the prolific parent of all the ignominious sins of the soul.'

"Commenting on the Prophet Ezekiel, St. Augustine says: 'When a man is at one and the same time fearless of God and given up to idleness, this latter becomes for him a skilful teacher of all that is most iniquitous: "This was the sin of Sodom thy sister, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance, and the idleness of her and her daughters."'\*

"In his thirty-fourth homily, St. Chrysostom says: 'The vice of fornication wells up, as it were quite naturally, from idleness which is one of its sources. He, however, whose mind is fully occupied with a multitude of busy cares, has not time to attend to the commission of evil deeds.'

"In his *Treatise on the Supreme Good* St. Isidore says: 'Every servant of God ought always to be engaged in reading, in working, or in praying, in order to keep at bay the tiger-spirit of fornication, which will assuredly force its way into the heart of him who is given up to idleness.'"

To these human testimonies we may add that of the Holy Ghost Who, in the Sacred Scripture, speaking of the vice of idleness, says: "Desires kill the slothful"; "He that followeth idleness shall be filled with poverty."† Hence, among the Egyptian Monks there was a proverb to the effect that "the laborious Monk has only one devil to tempt him; but the idle Monk is urged on to do evil by a whole legion of devils." Consequently, you must hate idleness and set a high value on every moment of time. When the evil one comes to suggest his filthy images to your mind, let him find you always busily occupied. If he come upon you in an idle moment, he will take advantage of it to hurry you into sin.

\* *Ezek.* xvi. 49.

† *Ibid.*, xxviii. 19.

(5) The frequent commission of deliberate venial sins is the fifth way which leads to the frightful evil of deadly sin. We have need to be on our guard against this way, with even greater watchfulness than against the other ways already mentioned; because, to the inexperienced eyes of youth, it appears to be so free from all danger. For, venial faults seem to be such triflingly light things. But, bear in mind that they are light, only in comparison with mortal sin. In themselves and absolutely, they are grave, so grave, indeed, as to exceed any merely temporal ill, no matter how terrible that may be. For, just consider calmly and dispassionately all the circumstances of the matter. Is that a slight evil which offends the infinite Majesty of God; which injures Our heavenly Father; which can be atoned for only by the priceless merits of Jesus Christ; which is punished by a most merciful God with the most awful severity, both in this life and in the life to come? What would you think of a child who is loved by his father as the very apple of his eye, who is reared by him and educated with more than maternal care, for whom there is prepared a rich inheritance, on whom is daily poured forth all the wealth of affection stored up in the heart of a fond parent—what, we repeat, would you think of that child, if he were to scorn, insult, strike, and wound the father who has, throughout life, well-nigh worshipped him? Of what value would you deem his excuse, if, when asked to desist from this unnatural conduct, he were to laugh in your face and say: “What I do is a mere trifle! I do not kill my father! Therefore, I do not mean to give over what you are pleased to term ‘my unnatural conduct.’” What would you think of that child, if, when warned again and again to be more dutiful and to make some return of affection to the parent who is lavishing on him his love, he were to reply, only by redoubling his offences and his insults? Would his acts appear to you to be mere trifling offences? I have no hesitation in saying that you would look on him as a monster of ingratitude. Well, then, is not God your Father Who made you, and created you, and possessed you? Has He not, when you were enslaved by sin and lying under its

bondage, freed you and redeemed you by the sweat and the blood, by the labour, the stripes and the death of His only-begotten Son? Has He not reared you with all care? Has He not raised you to the dignity of being a son of God? Is He not preparing for you, in heaven, an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, never fading? Do you, then, consider it to be a matter of little moment, when by means of deliberate venial sins you deride, condemn, and spit on a Father Who is so kind and so loving to you; that you scourge and trample under your feet His only-begotten Son Who has done and suffered so much for you? Yet this is the outrage of which you are guilty by the commission of these seemingly slight venial sins; for, as mortal sin, as far as it is possible to do such a thing, aims at destroying God, so, also, venial sin aims at deriding, insulting, and contemning His beloved Son. Again; should you consider it to be a matter of little moment to be covered with wounds and sores and ulcers; to be burnt up with fierce heat; to languish under malignant disease; to be subject to all the maladies that find a home in our public hospitals; and at the same time to be the sport of devils who would torment you in all the ingenious ways in which they exercise their wrath on the persons of those whom they are suffered to harass by obsession? If these ills do not, by any means, seem to you to be slight, why should deliberate venial sin appear to you to be a mere nothing; for, the united ills of the world, compared with it, dwindle into insignificance. In fact, with the exception of deadly sin, it is the only evil in the world, so that we should not be allowed to commit it, if by so doing we could ward off the swarm of calamitous misfortunes which are ever stinging and torturing the race of men.

Besides, you must ever bear in mind that deliberately to commit venial sin is full of deadly peril to the soul, particularly if venial sin is oftentimes repeated. For, this repetition engenders a bad habit; blinds the eyes of the mind; extinguishes in the heart all pious affection towards God; and, although venial sin does not deprive the soul of sanctifying grace, which is the soul's life, yet it cools the



fervour of charity. It causes God to withdraw certain special, actual graces. It makes Him loth to extend to us that particular protection and guardianship which He has over those who are His faithful servants. From the combination of these losses which are the result of a habit of venial sin, we may conclude that the man who is enslaved by it is nigh to a disastrous fall into mortal sin. This fall is the consequence which daily experience proves to be the almost inevitable outcome of this seemingly slight infidelity to God. Of this consequence, the Holy Scripture, the writings of the Fathers and of pious Authors give ample testimony. All unite in proclaiming that the habit of venial sin paves the way for the commission of mortal sin. Because it would weary the reader to adduce quotations from their writings, in proof of the correctness of this statement, and also, because it is easy to find, in other books, all that they have said on this subject, we will not reproduce them here.

(6) The sixth way which leads to deadly sin is all dangerous intercourse with even those who are not wicked. The Authors whose words we cited in the beginning of this Section consider to be dangerous all prolonged and unnecessary conversations with women; all excessively tender manifestations of affection; the frequenting of taverns; dancing, gaming, and the like, even though these various actions are done only to satisfy the exigencies of Society and not to carry out any evil intention. These are usually regarded as occasions of sin. Therefore, they are to be avoided by him who is about to enter Religion, lest, while in very sight of the haven of refuge, he should make miserable shipwreck of his virtue.\* With good reason may we expect that those who have this purpose in their hearts will carefully withdraw themselves from these occasions. For, what business have those who are resolved to live only for God, to waste their time in the company of women; to indulge in tender friendships; to give tender manifestations

\* They are not *necessarily* occasions of sin, since they do not *directly* lead to it. Persons must be guided, in these matters, by those to whom they lay open their conscience, as that which is an occasion for one man is not necessarily an occasion for another.

of love ; and, in one word, to burthen themselves with the habits of the worldly-minded ? Though all the votaries of the world may scorn you, call your careful guardianship of your heart “ prudery,” and endeavour to persuade you that there is no danger in doing that which they do, yet have the courage to make little account of their scorn and to give but scant credence to their words. Tell them that you are not of the world ; that you do not wish to be of the world ; and that you do not care to run the risk of incurring the ills which usually fall on those who rashly expose themselves to danger. Say, in the depth of your heart : “ To Thee, O good God ! Who hast deigned to call me to Thy service, and to Thee only, will I plight my faith. To Thee do I yield myself, with all the affection of my heart. To Thee, O Christ ! will I attach myself. I will love only Thee Whose Mother is a Virgin, Whose Father knoweth not woman. If I love Thee, I shall be chaste. If I embrace Thee, I shall be a virgin, indeed.” \*

(7) A seventh way leading to mortal sin is all loose, scurrilous conversation which may so easily slip into that which is obscene. Now, although all Christians are obliged by their profession to shun this kind of speech, because St. Paul, writing to the Ephesians, says : “ Let not obscenity, or foolish talking, or scurrility be so much as named among you, as becometh Saints ;” † yet, it ought especially to be avoided by the children of St. Benedict who, in his Holy Rule, most sternly proscribes all such discourse which by the fools of the world is sometimes mistaken for jocularity : “ As for buffoonery,” says our holy Father, “ and idle words, or for words that move to laughter, we utterly condemn and forbid them in all places, nor do we allow a disciple to open his mouth to give them utterance.” ‡ Is it possible for any condemnation of these words to be either more severe or more uncompromising ?

\* *Office of St. Agnes*, Noct. i., Respons. 3.

† *Cap. v. 3, 4.*

‡ *Reg., cap. vi.*

## SECTION IV.

*Special care must be taken not to expose yourself to the preceding occasions of sin, at the time when you take leave of the world.*

A very common snare by which the devil entangles the feet of those who aspire to the Religious State, draws them into sin, hinders them from following their vocation and sometimes succeeds in bringing about even their eternal damnation, is the custom, prevalent in some places, of what is called "leave-taking, or bidding farewell to the world." Only God can tell the number of the unhappy wretches who, caught in these toils, are now forced to weep bitter and unavailing tears over their folly which, at the very moment when they were about to become the servants and children of God, made them the bond-slaves of the devil and victims of the Almighty's wrath. What other name can we give to that luxuriousness of dress, to those interminable feastings, to those songs and dances, to those games and pastimes and to all those other useless squanderings of money, than so many entangling nets in which unwary youths are caught by the vanities of the world, and, under the foolish pretence of bidding it an eternal farewell, are hurried into deplorable excesses? Can that be called "bidding adieu to the world," which is nothing more or less than the binding down of the wretched soul, in the closest and strongest bonds, to the vilest servitude of the world? It is not in this way that men usually go to God, to Religion, to their true country. This is a path which leads in quite another direction, and of it we may safely say: "It seemeth just to a man, but the ends thereof lead to death."\* We read in St. Luke, that a young man who was called by Our Lord to follow Him made answer: "Lord, suffer me first to go and to bury my father." Our Lord said to him: "Let the dead bury their dead; but go thou and preach the kingdom of God."† Now, if Jesus Christ, the wisdom of God, would not allow those whom He called to His service to entangle themselves in worldly cares

\* Prov. xiv. 12.

† St. Luke, ix. 59.



and business, even under the pretence of filial piety, what answer, think you, would He make to those who should ask Him to suffer them first to feast with their friends; to wear, for yet some little time longer, gay and fashionable apparel; to join in the dance and to taste the other delights and vanities of the world? The same Evangelist relates that another youth said to Jesus: "I will follow Thee, Lord; but let me first take leave of them that are at my house." Our Lord made answer: "No man putting his hand to the plough and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."\* Explaining this passage, Euthymius says: "He who wishes to be a disciple of Christ, ought once and for ever to despise all things else and to follow Him; lest, by turning his eyes away from Christ, he be fascinated by the alluring objects which he has left behind." Can any one, then, be so foolish as to believe that, after hearing the call of Our Lord, he may turn back not only his eyes, but his whole being, to enjoy the vanities and the delights of the world? It is very much to be feared that those who see nothing blameworthy in such conduct will render themselves unfit for the kingdom of God in this world, that is to say, for the Religious State, and for the everlasting kingdom of God in the world to come.

Therefore, if you are in earnest about bidding adieu to the world, let that adieu be spoken once and for ever. "Farewell, all you with whom I have indulged in bad, or in dangerous conversations! Farewell, idleness, lewdness, and prurient curiosity! Farewell, intemperance in drink and all gluttonous indulgence of the appetite! Farewell, all that the world esteems and does! I will give heed to the exhortation of the Apostle and carry it into effect." "Let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly as in the day: not in rioting and in drunkenness, not in chambering and in impurities, not in contention and in envy, but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ."†

\* *St. Luke*, ix. 61, 62.

† *Rom.* xiii. 12, 13, 14.

## CHAPTER VI

THE POSTULANT MUST FREQUENTLY EXERCISE HIMSELF IN  
THOSE VIRTUES WHICH CONSTITUTE THE ESSENCE OF  
THE RELIGIOUS STATE

### SECTION I.

*The Postulant must exercise himself in the Acts of Poverty.*

HE who has resolved to consecrate himself to the service of God in the Religious State must not be satisfied with avoiding the occasions of sin and with keeping himself free from its guilt. Besides having these two negative virtues, he must strenuously devote himself to the performance of good works; for, if he defers the practice of these until he has actually embraced Religious Life, he shows, by that very fact, that he has only a slight esteem and a superficial love of his vocation, because he thinks that he may enter that holy profession, without having acquired any virtues, and without having any desire to acquire them. How will he be able, without the shielding protection of this nuptial garment, to stand beneath the searching gaze of the eternal King? Even in the presence of an earthly potentate, he would be covered with confusion, if he were forced to appear in torn and threadbare apparel. Now, if the maidens who were destined to stand before King Assuerus were, every day, for the space of six months, anointed with oil of myrrh, and, for the space of other six months, with costly aromatic unguents, and at last, only in the twelfth month, were allowed to enter his presence, after every means had been employed to adorn and educate them for that honour, with what a wealth of spiritual science ought those persons to be endowed, who are to stand

before the King of kings, the Lord of lords, and to be admitted among the number of His servants !

That you may be able to observe some order in the acquisition of those virtues which constitute these spiritual treasures, we will speak first of those which are identified with, and which are essential to the Religious State. This State is said to be a method of life in which men tend to acquire perfection, by the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. From this definition, it is evident that the three virtues which are the objects of these vows are of the essence of the Religious State. Hence, if any person does not make profession of all three, he is not, in the strict sense of the word, a Religious. Therefore, it is necessary that, as far as his condition of life will permit, the Postulant should practise the acts of those virtues which will afterwards constitute the matter of his vows. In the first place, then, let us consider by what acts he may practise religious poverty.

This consists in the abdication of all right of ownership over anything whatever ; in the withdrawal of our affection from temporal possessions ; and in the abandonment of superfluity in food, dress, furniture, and the like. Now, although he who aspires to lead the Religious Life is master of his property, as long as he remains in the world, yet he may, by observing the following counsels and by the aid of God's grace, prepare himself for the practice of poverty when he does eventually take the final step, by giving up all things in order to follow Christ.

(I) Loosen the affections of your heart from undue cleaving to worldly possessions, so that, if by any accident, or by any mischance, you should be deprived of them, you would be able, with a calm and imperturbed mind, to bear their loss. How pleasing to God is a disposition such as this which, in the midst of wealth, keeps the heart nobly free from all attachment to earthly dross, is clearly manifested by an incident which is related in the life of St. Severinus, Archbishop of Cologne. At the time in which this illustrious Prelate lived, there was a holy hermit whose life was a marvel of great and admirable virtue. He was the son of



one of the chief nobles of the country, and he had been delicately nurtured amid all the luxuries that his high rank and immense wealth could command. As was natural, his parents, when he had arrived at man's estate, thought of procuring for him a suitable bride. An alliance which satisfied their fondest wishes opportunely presented itself, and on the appointed day the future helpmate of their son was brought, with great pomp and splendour, to their ancestral abode. But when, on the evening of his marriage day, their son entered his bridal chamber, like another Valerian,\* he found—to his utter amazement—standing in the middle of the room, a youth of majestic beauty and commanding mien, who, with great gentleness, addressing him, said: "If thou wilt follow and obey me, I will give thee far greater wealth, and will crown thee with a more resplendent glory than is any to which thou canst aspire here below." The bridegroom expressed his readiness and his willingness to go whithersoever it should please the youth to lead; and forthwith they both left the Castle. As the future hermit passed out, he picked up and carried off with him a wooden cup which was used for pouring wine into the vessels of gold and of silver which were set before the guests. Together they penetrated into the deepest recesses of a vast solitude; and there for a long time the young noble gave himself up to the austerities and the devout exercises of the solitary life. At last he began most earnestly to beseech God the just Judge, to point out to him the man with whom he was to have an equal reward in heaven. In answer to his prayer, it was made known to him that his recompense was to be equal to that which should be bestowed on a certain Severinus, Archbishop of the Church of Cologne. When he furthermore petitioned that there should be granted to him the favour of seeing this holy Prelate, the young man whom he had first met in his own bridal chamber once again stood before him and conducted him to the abode of the Archbishop. It happened that when they arrived, a vast number of guests had assembled

\* The husband of St. Cecily.

at the palace to celebrate some local festival. After the Divine Office, they foregathered in the great hall, and a sumptuous banquet was spread before them. Perceiving the number and the delicacy of the dishes, the choice nature of the wines, the wealth of silver plate, the servants and the retainers, the hermit was downcast at the thought that he was to receive only the same reward that a man was to obtain who held possession of those very things which he had abandoned. But his guide, knowing what was passing in his thoughts, severely reprehended him and told him that the Archbishop was less attached to all this worldly wealth and pomp and glory, than he was to the wretched wooden vessel which he had carried off with him from his ancestral abode. Thereupon, returning to the place whence he had come, he thanked God for the mercy which had been vouchsafed to him, and during the rest of his life humbly besought God that he might be found worthy to share in the reward which the just Judge should bestow upon the Archbishop Severinus. Imitate the conduct of this holy man, and if God has given you the riches of this world, attend to the counsel of the Royal Prophet: "If riches abound, set not thy heart upon them."\* If, on the other hand, you are forced to live in straitened circumstances, set not your heart on the little that you possess, but try to be like the first four most holy followers of Our divine Lord. Their whole worldly substance consisted of a few worn-out fishing-nets on which they depended for their daily bread; nevertheless, because, they left even these when Jesus called them to follow Him, their reward was not less than that of the Evangelist St. Matthew who gave up great wealth in order to be a disciple of Our Lord.

(2) For the love of Christ Who Himself was poor, be ready and willing, from time to time, to have a practical experience of the inconveniences of poverty. You may do this both by depriving yourself of some unnecessary comfort and by cheerfully submitting to some discomfort which you might easily remove or avoid. Thus you

\* Ps. lxi.

will imitate Our good Jesus Who, though Master of the universe, Lord of Angels and of men, yet divested Himself of whatever was pleasing to flesh and blood, whereas He might, had He so willed it, have enjoyed to the full all innocent earthly pleasures and have warded off those numberless ills which pressed so heavily upon Him: "For our sakes He became poor, whereas He was rich."\* Hence it came to pass that He was born in an open stable, amid the snows and the ice of winter; He was laid in a manger instead of in a soft bed; He suffered, as the poor are forced to suffer them, the ills of hunger, thirst, cold, and heat. Therefore, imitate His example, and, through love of Him, deprive yourself of those numberless little unnecessary luxuries with which you so carefully surround yourself, and do not shrink, like a coward, from everything that might inflict on you either inconvenience or discomfort.

(3) Lay aside, and have a contempt for that puerile vanity which shows itself in finery of dress, in an over-great attention to and a care of the hair, and in other matters of a similar character. In these respects, the conduct of the ancient philosophers is well worthy of our imitation. These men, enlightened by only natural reason and animated with a love of science, divested themselves not only of superfluities, but of many things which are considered to be necessities. They put to shame many of us, who are wedded to our little, unnecessary objects of vanity, and who will not, for God's sake, give up that which these men instinctively cast aside as worthless and as unbecoming those who are endowed with the god-like faculty of reason. Of a truth, one whose affection cleaves to these things shows clearly enough that he has little or nothing of the spirit of Jesus Christ. This lover of poverty was content, during His whole life, with one poor garment of cheap and common texture. He was willing to feel the need of even that which is thought to be necessary. In so doing, He gave to those who wish to follow Him an example of the spirit with which they ought to be animated in their use of temporal goods.

\* 2 Cor. viii. 9.



Therefore, while cultivating that neatness of person and that propriety of dress for which no one will find fault with you, look on it as unbecoming a Christian, to be studiously careful in the *adornment* of your person and openly avow that you have determined to tread in the footsteps of Him Who had not whereon to lay His head. Therefore, banish from your dressing-table perfumes, oils, pomades, mirrors, hair-curling implements, and the multitudinous other vanities which silly youths employ to beautify those heads which lack all other adornment. Such things are quite out of place in the rooms of those who have determined to follow Him "Who was poor and in labours from His youth."

(4) If God has blessed you with the substance of this world, be not so foolish as to squander it in gaming, or in purchasing curiosities, or in surrounding yourself with those useless trifles which cumber the chambers of men who have more wealth than wisdom. Imitate our Blessed Lady the Mother of Jesus Christ. What did she do with the costly gifts and the treasures bestowed on her by the Wise Men who came from the East Country to worship her Son? In all probability she spent them on the poor who were so dear to the Infant Saviour, reserving for herself nothing but that which was necessary to satisfy her few and simple wants. What a brilliant example of detachment from these transitory things does she put before us, by thus refreshing and comforting the poor with that which was given for her own use and by employing it for those purposes and on those subjects which were so well deserving of her charity! When that young man of whom mention is made in the Gospel, had heard from Christ: "If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast, and come, follow Me, and thou shalt have a never-failing treasure in heaven," he went away sad; for, he was very rich. You have done that which he had not the courage to do; you have resolved to leave all and to follow Christ. But, for yet a little while, you will not have to make the actual sacrifice which you are bent on making. Therefore, in the interval, prove by your actions and by your manner of life, that you have withdrawn your affections

from your wealth. Do not look on it as a hardship that you cannot any longer conduct yourself as a rich man would conduct himself, and you will thus be heaping up for yourself vast possessions in the treasure-house of heaven.

(5) You should not be careless about anything that you possess, nor should you suffer either slovenliness or dirt to appear in any of the various objects with which you are surrounded. Study rather, without affectation and without vanity, to be scrupulously neat and clean. A poor habit was always a pleasing object to St. Bernard ; but not a dirty one. Our holy Father, also, though a zealous lover of poverty, yet, in precise terms, prescribes cleanliness, when, in the thirty-second chapter of the Rule, he orders a severe rebuke to be administered to any one "that shall treat the property of the Monastery in a slovenly or in a negligent manner"; and also when, in the thirty-fifth chapter, he ordains that, on Saturdays, there should be a general washing : "On Saturday, let him who endeth his week in the kitchen make all things clean. Let him wash the towels wherewith the Brethren wipe their hands and their feet. He shall deliver to the Cellarer, clean and whole, all the vessels of his office." On the same subject, the philosopher Seneca says : "Your dress need not be splendid ; but, at the same time, it need not be dirty."\* Therefore, let neatness and cleanliness be the characteristic marks of everything that belongs to you—of your room, your clothes, your books, your furniture. Never suffer any untidiness or any dirt to be seen in any of these. Do not be ambitious to have an unlimited supply of every necessity, or to own the best of everything, but content yourself with a few things, and those, too, of the cheap and common sort. It is St. Benedict's wish that his children should be satisfied with whatever is meanest and poorest. He allows them but few

\* "Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,  
But not expressed in fancy ; rich, not gaudy ;  
For the apparel oft proclaims the man."

—*Hamlet*, act. i., sc. 3.

things ; and yet he does not deny them what is necessary for their wants. His ordinances, in this respect, will sit lightly on those who, while still in the world, make it their aim to do without many of those conveniences for which others crave ; but they will be as a burthen of lead on the necks of those who multiply their wants and who will have nothing but that which is dearest and best. Even in Religious Life, this taste will cling to them. They will desire to satisfy it ; and this satisfaction cannot be enjoyed without injury to the virtue of poverty. Their minds will be filled with the thought of these things, and their hearts will cleave to them with great affection and with a tenacity which it is difficult to loose. “My Brethren,” says St. Bernard, “you are fully convinced,—and God grant that your conviction may never be intensified by sad experience,—of the enervating, the emasculating effect on the will-power and on the mental vigour of men, which is exercised by that which is beautiful and by that which has about it the fascinating attraction of cultured society. For, although the pleasure which such objects are able to afford consists in anticipation rather than in actual fruition, and although there are some men who use these things as if they used them not, yet the affection with which the heart cleaves to these possessions is far more easily overcome and plucked out of the soul by abstinence from their enjoyment, than it is sated by their continual use. The reason is not far to seek. It is nothing more or less than that our external surroundings contribute not a little to the moulding of the internal dispositions of our soul. Thus, in some men, concupiscence is bridled and kept within due bounds by the poverty of the life which they lead. In others the love of poverty itself is fostered by the simplicity with which they compass themselves. In effect, it is only proper that a disregard for outward polish and for mere material elegance should be one of the marks of a mind intent on internal things. That disregard is an indication that the mind is living in quite another atmosphere, and that it is busied about quite another class of objects different from those which engross the thoughts of carnal-minded



men. It brings about, in the soul, the repose of a good conscience ; it is an unmistakable sign that all these earthly trappings are vile and worthless in its eyes."\*

## SECTION II.

*The Postulant must strive to keep his Chastity unstained.*

The object of the second essential vow of the Religious State is chastity. This virtue must be cultivated and guarded with the most jealous care by him who desires to enter Religion : first, because of its own special intrinsic excellence which imprints on the souls of those who are clean of heart a certain angelic character, endears them to God, to our Blessed Lady, and draws down on them a copious shower of graces and favours from the Fountain of Mercy ; secondly, because of the horrible evils in which the contrary vice enfolds its slaves who, if they should unhappily succeed in making their profession carry these evils with them into Religious Orders. Therefore, he who intends to enter the Religious State ought to be fired with as great an ardour to acquire the virtue of purity and to preserve it free from stain, as inflames the bosom of the miser to hoard up wealth and inspires him with courage to defend it from the clutches of the prowling thief. Any one that pretends to be thus minded must give a practical proof that the sentiments which he entertains with respect to chastity are genuine. How can he do this ? By avoiding, with the greatest care, everything that might tarnish its splendour, everything that might threaten it with destruction ; by undertaking, with heroic courage, everything that will keep its brightness free from the slightest speck or stain.

We have already, in the preceding chapter, treated of the dangers which beset the virtue of chastity, and of the various ways which lead to its loss. While so doing, we pointed out the means to be employed for the purpose of avoiding deadly sin. The chief of these is the careful shun-

\* St. Bernard, *De Vita Solit. Coll.*, 16.

ning of the various occasions which lead to sin. Now, although these occasions must be avoided in the case of other sins, yet there is a special necessity for so doing in the case of those occasions which lead to impurity ; for, unless a man flees from them, it is morally impossible that the flower of chastity should long continue to bloom in his heart. However, in spite of all that has already been said, we will venture to give you yet one other piece of advice. It is this: never be induced to believe that it is sufficient, with respect to occasions dangerous to purity, to avoid only those that are proximately conducive to sin. On the contrary, be firmly persuaded that he who wishes to preserve untarnished the splendour of his chastity, must shun even the shadow of the contrary vice. In this respect, no precaution is too great. Therefore, avoid all that is remotely offensive to modesty and to purity. Be particularly careful to set a guard over your bodily senses, lest you should be led on by a curiosity which in itself may be innocent, to indulge in actions over which you would have to weep bitter tears of repentance. Avoid all unnecessary contact with others and all light behaviour. Let nothing that is either soft or effeminate be noticeable in your conversation. Let it not be seen in your gait, or in the glance of your eyes, or in the smile which plays on your lips, or in any motion of your body. Wherever you chance to be, have a great respect for yourself. If you are undressing, or if you have already retired to rest, or if you are engaged in the performance of any other action, always behave as you would behave if you were standing in the presence of a grave and venerable man. For, although no human eye beholds you, yet the penetrating, the searching, the all-seeing eye of God is on you. Not one single act of yours can escape its glance, and, in His own good time, He will weigh them all with unerring accuracy. If they have been offensive to modesty, He will punish them with terrible severity. Now, if the presence of a venerable man be able to hinder you from the commission of any shameful deed, will not the ever-abiding presence of God be able to restrain your lust ? Your faith teaches you

that you cannot screen yourself from His eyes. This is the argument which St. Bernard uses to impress on the minds of his Monks this awe-inspiring thought : " Never dare," he says, " to do in God's presence that which you would be ashamed to do in mine." After these few prefatory remarks, we will now proceed to point out to you the other means which you must continually employ and the other acts which you must strenuously perform, if you wish to be duly prepared for the observance of perpetual chastity in the Religious State.

" Presently, by the remembrance of Christ, to dash against the rock Christ all the evil thoughts that come into his heart."\* This may be done in several ways. First, by humbly and earnestly beseeching Our Lord to give you the victory; secondly, by throwing yourself, with complete confidence, into His arms, putting all your hope in Him and utterly distrusting yourself and your own strength; thirdly, by devoutly meditating on His bitter Passion. For, like those who gazed on the brazen serpent, he who looks on Christ crucified will be preserved from the destructive and venomous fangs of the infernal serpent. The wondrous efficacy of this means made St. Augustine wish that others should benefit by it, as he himself had benefited, and, therefore, in one of his works,† he thus writes of it : " When any foul thought knocks for admission at the door of my heart, I run for protection to the wounds of Christ. When the flesh is crushing me down beneath its tyrannous power, I free myself from its iron grasp by the remembrance of His stripes. When the malignant devil lies in wait to ensnare me, I flee for refuge to the tender compassion of my Lord, and the evil one abandons his purpose. If the fiery heat of lust scorches the members of my body, its fever is cooled by the recollection of those gaping wounds which bled for me. For all my ills I have been able to discover no remedy more efficacious than are the wounds of my Lord. In them I sleep secure; in them I rest without fear." In the chapter which follows that

\* *Reg.*, cap. iv., instr. 50.

† *Manuale*, cap. xxii.



from which these words are taken, the Saint says: "There is no remedy that so effectually cools, in our blood, the fever heat of lust, as does the death of our Redeemer. Lo, He hangs upon the Cross, and opens wide His arms, and stretches forth His hands to catch the sinner to His bosom ! I wish to live, and I desire to die, in the loving embrace of my Saviour." Therefore, when importunate thoughts come to the door of your mind, clamouring for admission, represent to yourself the Passion and the death of Christ. Remember that He is looking at you through the mist of blood which has dimmed His eyes, that He is speaking to you, while all the time His life-blood is ebbing fast away. Then stir up in your heart a generous resolve to abandon the uncleanness of the flesh that you may put on the purity of the spirit. Say, with St. Bernard : " My Lord is hanging on His Cross of pain, and shall I give myself up to fleshly delights ? " Take notice that, in the counsel which St. Benedict gives us, to dash the evil thoughts of our minds against the rock Christ, he puts in the phrase the word "*presently*," and orders us *presently* or at once to do this. It is not without a very good reason that he has used this little word. For, of a surety, if in any matter there is for the soul peril in delay, it is unquestionably in this slippery matter of impurity. Therefore, evil thoughts must *quickly* be dealt with, before they have time to take root. " It is only through thought," says St. John Damascene, " that we come to the performance of acts. The beginning of every act lies in some thought. At first, this thought is but a very small germ ; then it grows by every fresh accession of reflection, till at last it becomes something very great. Therefore, never let any evil thought gain the mastery over you, but, while it is still young and weak, hinder it from fastening its grip upon your soul ; for, unless you do this, only with the utmost exertion will you be able afterwards to shake it off." Hence it is that St. Benedict counsels us "*speedily* to cut off all desires of the flesh ;" \* and, in the Prologue to his Rule, bids us " take our thoughts

\* *Reg.*, cap. vii., grad. 1.

while they are still little ones, and dash them against the rock Christ." Explaining this passage, Cardinal Turrecremata says: "The malignant spirit is reduced to naught, when we lay hold of his first suggestions and crush them while they are still in their infancy, before they have acquired strength."

"And as I knew," says the writer of the Book of Wisdom, "that I could not otherwise be continent unless God gave it, I went to the Lord and besought Him with my whole heart."\* That which this illustrious man did to obtain chastity, St. Benedict, in these well-known words of his Prologue, exhorts us to do: "Let us beg of Our Lord, to supply, by the assistance of His grace, that which our nature is unable to perform." But, in order to obtain from God the priceless gift which you ask, you must pray for it with a heart that is profoundly humble, that is utterly distrustful of itself, and that has a boundless confidence in God. To fill it with these sentiments, let the following supplication of Holy Church often be on your lips, and let it frequently, during the course of the day, rise from your heart as an odour of sweetness before the Lord: "Inflame, O Lord! my reins and my heart with the fire of thy Holy Spirit, that, with a chaste body, I may serve Thee, and with a pure heart may please Thee, through Jesus Christ Our Lord." Greater weight and efficacy will be added to this prayer, if you call to your aid Mary, the most glorious Mother of God, Queen of heaven and of earth. Make yourself a devout client of this Virgin of Virgins, and she will stand by your side in all the conflicts that you must, of necessity, go through in defence of the treasure of your purity.

There were two youths, with whom we were acquainted, who, by their filial piety towards her, had secured for themselves her maternal love and protection. One of them was in the habit of frequently thus addressing her: "O most pure Mother! by thy holy virginity and by thy immaculate conception, chasten my heart and my flesh in the name of the

\* *Wisd.* viii. 21.

Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." The other was accustomed, every morning and every night, to add to the Hail Mary the following oblation of himself: "Most holy Virgin! I give thee my eyes, my ears, my mouth, my hands, and my heart. Help me, by thy powerful intercession, never more to offend either God or thee, my loving protectress! Whenever I am tempted, I resolve to raise my heart to thee, and to say: 'Most holy Virgin! now is the moment of trial. Come to my aid, O Lady! for I belong to Jesus and to thee.'" So salutary was the effect which both experienced from their prayer, and so substantial was the aid which it procured for them, that the first on oath made the following declaration: "From that day I was never afterwards, throughout the rest of my life, troubled by the sting of the flesh; and others also, whom I induced to take up the practice, experienced from it a similar beneficial result." The second did not hesitate to say that he "felt himself so strengthened in the hour of temptation, that he deemed it impossible that he should ever again fall into deadly sin."\*

If the scope of this work allowed it, we would gladly put before you many other examples, all tending to prove the same truth; however, as that would lead us beyond the limits marked out for us, we will content ourselves with exhorting you to impress on yourself the conclusion which they must force on you, and that is "in various ways, and by a persevering devotion, to venerate this most holy Virgin." Then God will lend a ready and willing ear to your prayer; for, He has appointed that we should have everything through Mary.† Listen to the words of exhortation which St. Bernard addresses to you: "O thou, whosoever thou art, that knowest thyself to be here,—not so much walking on firm ground, as tossed to and fro by the gales and the storms of this life's ocean,—if thou wouldst not be overwhelmed by the tempest, keep thine eyes fixed on this star's

\* Nadasi, *Annus Marian.*

† It was through her that mankind received Jesus Christ; and "how hath He not with Him given us all things?"



clear shining. If the hurricanes of temptation rise against thee, and if thou art running on the rocks of trouble, look to the star, call on Mary. If the waves of pride, or of ambition, or of slander, or of envy toss thee, look to the star, call on Mary. If the billows of anger, or of avarice, or of the enticements of the flesh beat against thy soul's frail little bark, look to Mary. . . . In danger, in difficulty, in doubt, think on Mary, call on Mary. Let her not be away from thy mouth, or from thy heart; and that thou mayest not lack the succour of her prayers, turn not aside from the example of her life. If thou follow her, thou wilt never go astray, if thou pray to her, thou wilt never despair. If thou keep her in mind, thou wilt never wander. If she hold thee thou wilt never fall. If she lead thee, thou wilt never be weary. If she help thee, thou wilt reach home safely at the last."\* Also, have a special devotion to St. Joseph, to St. John the Baptist, to the Evangelist St. John, to our holy Father St. Benedict, and to those other Saints who were particularly illustrious for their heroic defence of this angelic virtue, that, through their merits and their intercession, you may obtain from God that heavenly gift for which they so gloriously contended while on the battlefield of this life.

"Be mindful of thy last end, and thou shalt never sin."† It is for this reason that St. Benedict orders us "to have death always before our eyes; to fear the day of judgment; to be afraid of hell; with a spiritual thirst to desire life everlasting."‡ In order to comply with his precept, some persons are accustomed to make a kind of rosary out of these thoughts and thus to impress them on their minds. At the Cross they say: "Be mindful of thy last end, and thou shalt never sin;" at each of the large beads: "O eternity, eternity!" at each of the small ones: "O death! O judgment! O hell! O heaven!" Between each of these may be said: "O death! how soon must I endure the stroke of thy dart! O judgment! how terrible wilt thou be, if I yield to sin! O hell! with what severity wilt thou

\* *Homilia* ii., *super* "Missus est."

† *Ecclus.* vii. 40.

‡ *Reg.*, cap. iv., instr. 41, 44, 45, 46.

torture those whom thou shalt swallow into thy flaming gulfs! O heaven! how full wilt thou be to me of never-fading delights, if I yield not now to the degrading pleasures of sin! O eternity of pain! O eternity of joy unspeakable! O eternity, eternity!"

As soon as we perceive that we are assaulted by fleshly desires, we ought at once to remember that God is always present with us, according to these words in which the Prophet, addressing the Lord, says: "O Lord! all my desire is before Thee."\* As we have already, in a preceding chapter,† treated, at considerable length, of this means, nothing further need here be said about it.

✓ Whoever is determined to keep his chastity unstained must not be soft and tender in his treatment of his body. Hence it is that St. Benedict orders us "to chastise our bodies; to love fasting; not to seek for delight; not to be given to wine; and not to indulge ourselves in overmuch eating."‡ Of the manner in which you ought to treat your body, we will speak farther on; for the present let it be sufficient for you to read, in the words of St. Gregory, the account of that glorious victory which our holy Father gained over his flesh while he was yet a mere stripling:

"On one occasion, when the servant of God was alone, the author of evil, under the form of a little bird, came to tempt him. This bird began to fly about his head, and came so close to him that, had he pleased, he might have caught it with his hand. When he signed himself with the sign of the holy Cross, the bird flew away. But the holy man was at once assaulted by a temptation of the flesh so terribly violent that during the whole course of his preceding life he did not remember to have ever suffered the like. It seems that there was a certain lady whom he had seen in former years, the memory of whose beauty was so vividly brought back to his mind by the spirit of evil, that it enkindled in his soul so fierce a fire of concupiscence, as well-nigh to consume him in its flames; for, it so nearly overcame his fixed

\* *Reg.*, cap. vii., grad. 1.

† *Chap.* v., sect. 3.

‡ *Cap.* iv., instr. 11, 12, 13, 35, 36.

resolve, that he was on the point of for ever quitting his solitude. But God's grace was at hand to deliver him from the impending evil. For, coming to himself, and seeing the chasm on the brink of which he had been standing, he stripped off his habit and plunged naked into a brake of thorns and briars which was hard by his cave, and in these rolled about till his whole body was horribly pierced and torn by their sharp points. Thus, by turning pleasure into pain, he healed the wound of his soul. By inflicting wounds upon his body and by the outward agony of his flesh, he quenched the fire which raged within his heart. From that time forth, as he afterwards told his disciples, he felt that the revolt of the flesh had been so thoroughly quelled within him, that his enemy did not dare again to raise his head."\*

Let the heroic act of our holy Father stir up your zeal and inspire you with the resolve not over-indulgently to treat your body, but to accustom it to endure hardship, by making use of the various means which we will, in due time and place, explain to you; for, he who daintily feeds his slave will afterwards find him stubborn and rebellious.

Surius relates that St. Bernardine of Siena was so modest and pure, that if an unbecoming word chanced to reach his ear, a burning blush of shame suffused his whole countenance, just as if he had received a sharp blow on the cheek. This fact was so well known, that even his school companions when at play, abstained from uttering any coarse expressions, if they perceived that he was hard by. The servants, also, of his ancestral home had so high an idea of his spotless purity that, whenever he was within ear-shot, they did not dare to say anything that was in the least degree unbecoming. An almost similar testimony is given of the angelic purity of St. Francis of Sales. We would have you resemble these two Saints of Holy Church, so that, in your presence, no one will ever have the hardihood to say anything that would bring a blush to your cheek, and that the sweet odour of your chastity may diffuse its

\* *Dialog.*, lib. ii., cap. 2.



perfume around the persons of those with whom you come in contact. Thus, wherever you chance to be, you will be the good odour of Christ unto all that know you.

The zealous lovers of this angelic virtue were not afraid, even in their youthful years, to guard, under the protecting shield of a vow, the jewel of their chastity which they kept, with jealous care, in the casket of their hearts. From among the many who had the courage to act thus, we will select only two that were remarkable for the love with which they cultivated this queen of virtues. The first is St. Edmund, a Monk of our own Order and afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury; the second is St. Aloysius, one of the glories of the illustrious Society of Jesus. Of St. Edmund, Surius says: "This Saint did not simply flee from the foul, degrading pleasures of the flesh, he held them in absolute abhorrence; and although he earnestly endeavoured to implant the other virtues in his soul, yet he made it his special aim to acquire and to tend, with unwearying care, the delicate virtue of chastity, well knowing that saying of the Wise Man: 'Incorruption bringeth near to God.'\*" As a natural consequence of this diligence, he was enabled, by the aid of grace, to keep his virginity inviolate till the last hour of his life. But, to make assurance doubly sure, he consulted a prudent confessor as to the best means for guarding from all stain this easily tarnished virtue. By that confessor's advice, he one day, while kneeling in prayer before an image of Mary, ever Virgin, made a vow of chastity, commending himself to her special protection and choosing her as his bride. To make the compact into which he then entered firm and lasting, he drew forth a golden ring on which was engraved the angelic salutation, and, placing that ring on the finger of her image, besought his Queen to regard him, from that day forth, as her most loving spouse. Shortly before his holy death, he told those who stood around, that ever afterwards, when he implored the aid of that Mother of Mercy, he straightway obtained the favour for which he asked—the cessation of

\* *Wisd.* vi. 20.

harassing temptations, consolation and support in the midst of bitter persecution, healing remedies for various weaknesses and maladies, heavenly joy in the midst of his afflictions and sorrows."

Of St. Aloysius, Cepari, his biographer, thus writes: "After this holy youth had read a little work which treated of the mysteries of the Rosary, he felt a very strong desire to do something that would be acceptable to the Queen of heaven. While thinking what it would be best for him to undertake in her honour, it occurred to him that nothing would be more pleasing to her than the consecration to her by vow, of his virginity. This act would enable him to tread in her footsteps, at least as far as it was possible for one so lowly to imitate a model so exalted. Therefore, while praying one day before an image of our Mother Mary, he vowed to God that, with the help of divine grace, he would keep his virginity inviolate for the rest of his mortal life. So exactly and with a fidelity so unwavering, did he observe this vow, that those who had the privilege of being his confessors declared that his body was free from the incitements to lust, and his mind as clear as an unclouded sky, from all the vapours of unholy thoughts and unseemly imaginations. A privilege so great, surpassing, as it does, the inborn power of human nature, was given to him by God, as a special and peculiar gift, at the request of the immaculate Mother."

With what sentiments do these examples inspire your heart? If they are sentiments of admiration and of approval, we may say to you what Our Lord said to the man in the Gospel: "Go thou and do in like manner." Therefore, tread in the footsteps of these two Saints; bind yourself, at least for some time, by the vow of chastity. But take notice that you must not, on any account, or for any reason, do this without first consulting your director and obtaining his sanction for the step which you meditate. From him you must make it a practice to ask advice, not only in the tribunal of penance, but out of it, concerning all matters that have reference to your eternal welfare, and particularly with reference to everything that regards your personal

purity. By acting thus, you will comply with one of our holy Father's counsels, a counsel which urges us always "to reveal to our Spiritual Father the evil thoughts that enter our hearts."\* No practice is better than this for hindering your feet from being entangled in the snares of the devil. Therefore, never conceal anything from your spiritual guide, whether it is a temptation or a doubt, but particularly if it is anything that concerns your virtue. Unless you do this, you will never be safe; you will always be on the brink of the very serious danger of being deceived by the wiles of the most wicked one.

### SECTION III.

*Of the way in which the Postulant must exercise Obedience.*

Obedience is the third essential vow of the Religious State. The virtue which is the object of this vow, together with the virtue of humility, constitutes the spirit of St. Benedict's Order. Therefore, it is but rational to expect that he who feels himself called to serve God in that Order, will be careful, before he assumes the holy habit, to exercise himself in the various acts of this, the Order's, characteristic virtue. To help you to do this, we will point out several ways in which you may accustom yourself to give up your own will, by the practice of holy obedience.

With respect to commands which may be given to you by masters, by parents, and by any one else that has authority over you, show yourself to be as flexible as a young sapling is before the winds which beat against it. In accepting any advice that they may choose to impart, let your intelligence and your will be as impressionable as wax is to receive the images which we wish to fix on it. Give a ready obedience not only to their express orders, but to their unspoken wishes. If, while in the world, you act in this way with those who have authority over you, you will not fail in Religious Life to act in a similar way with your Superiors,

\* *Reg.*, cap. iv., instr. 50, 51.



and, by so doing, you will be a source of joy and consolation to their hearts.

St. Fulgentius used to subject himself to all his mother's commands, in order that his actions might be similar to those of Jesus Christ, of Whom the Holy Scripture says that He was most submissive to His parents.

St. Herman, from his earliest years, took special care that his heart should not be the slave of his own good pleasure, but that it should be the loyal subject of his parents' will and of the Superiors whom they placed over him. These Superiors he obeyed with reverential fear ; and, even with the companions of his school-life, he conducted himself in a manner so kind and accommodating, that they were knit to him in the ties of the fastest friendship.

St. Aloysius was filled with so great love of obedience that, as his tutor testified, the holy youth never transgressed even his slightest wish.

Learn from these examples with ready will to bear the yoke of obedience ; then Religious Life will be for you a very paradise. In that which you do, through obedience, be not slow, or sullen, or half-hearted ; on the contrary, endeavour to be always quick, generous, and joyous : "for, God loveth a cheerful giver." Obedience which is marked by these characteristics will at one and the same time be acceptable to God, and most pleasing to those persons to whom it is given, for His sake.

Be very careful to eliminate from your obedience all intentions that are the result of natural impulse or of natural inclination. Try rather to animate, with some supernatural motive, everything that you do through obedience, by adoring, venerating, and worshipping God and His most holy will in your Superiors and in that which they command. For, as St. Benedict says : "The obedience which is given to them is given to God Who hath said : 'He that heareth you, heareth Me.'"\* Consequently, it is of the greatest importance that you should have this supernatural motive in all that you do ; for, otherwise your obedience will

\* *Reg.*, cap. v.

be neither solid nor virtuous. Therefore, accustom yourself to accomplish the commands of your Superiors, not as if you were obeying men ; but receive and carry into effect each of their orders, as if you were obeying a mandate that had come direct from God. Do not take notice of the natural qualities of those who are placed over you, or of the manner in which they issue their instructions and require your submission ; for, by closing your eyes to these merely accidental circumstances, you will be enabled to seat your obedience on a sure and solid foundation which will not be shaken by even the most rigorous and unpalatable precept that it is possible for them to impose.

Accustom yourself never to do anything simply and solely because it pleases you, or because it gratifies some whim or some fancy, or because it is convenient for you ; but be ready to contradict your own will and to refuse that which it asks you to do. Thus, when you feel prompted to examine with curiosity any particular object, or to gainsay the opinions advanced by another person, or to hear some piece of news, or to taste some pleasure, or to behold some rare sight, do not yield to the inclination which is stirring within you ; but say to yourself : “ For Thy sake, O my God ! I will not examine this object ; I will listen with patience to the arguments laid before me ; I will not seek to hear that which I desire to hear ; I will deny myself this pleasure ; I will close my eyes, and I will not gratify them with the contemplation of this curiosity.”

Now, although each of these acts of self-renunciation may, in itself, seem to be a very small, insignificant matter, yet no words can adequately express their admirable aptitude for disposing the will, in due season, to perform even heroic acts of obedience. On the other hand, very little virtue can be expected from one who everywhere and in everything seeks his own personal convenience, pleasure, and satisfaction ; who yields to his whims, and who has not the courage to make the slightest sacrifice. If we may look for very little that is good, we have reason to fear that from his heart will spring very much that is evil. Therefore, by

that which you do in the way of obedience, show that you are a master of yourself; and, as you desire to be a follower of Christ, strive to do that which He requires from those who would tread in His footsteps: "He that will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his Cross daily, and follow Me."

Draw up for yourself a rule of life, and in that rule mark out the hours to be devoted to prayer, to study, and to recreation. Submit this *horarium*, for approbation, to your Spiritual Director, and then strictly adhere to it. Punctually perform each of your duties at the time appointed for that duty, even when it is somewhat inconvenient for you to do so, and when you feel more inclined to busy yourself about something else. In addition to many other advantages which this wholesome discipline will bring with it will be this: that you will acquire the habit of being always occupied in that which is in accordance with your Superior's wishes, and not in that which is the subject of your own whimsical choice. This is a circumstance which powerfully conduces to make Religious men perfect in the virtue of obedience. Accustom yourself to impregnate with it every action that you perform, and your Religious Life will be full of sweetness; for, the well-spring of whatever bitterness there may be in a life of this nature is the fact that men wish to be ruled and to be occupied in accordance with their own views and wishes, and not in accordance with the views and the wishes of their Superiors.

Finally, to those who, in any way, have authority over you, be truly and unfeignedly reverential; and, as St. Benedict says: "Love them with sincere and humble charity."\* By venerating them, show your reverence for God, and in all places and on every occasion uphold their honour and defend their good name. By acting in this way, you will be filled with the spirit of our Order, and throughout the whole course of your life you will be flooded with that quiet of soul, with those spiritual joys and sweetnesses which will very materially aid you to advance with rapid strides in the way of perfection.

\* Cap. lxxii.



## CHAPTER VII

### OF THE WAY IN WHICH THE POSTULANT MUST PREPARE HIMSELF TO PRACTISE "STABILITY AND AMENDMENT OF MANNERS"

IN the preliminary instruction to this little work, we said that, besides the vows common to all Religious Orders, Benedictines undertake and in the act of their profession make explicit mention of two other means of perfection. These are "Stability and amendment of manners": *Pro-mitto stabilitatem et conversionem morum meorum*. That you may come from the world, duly prepared to make use of these two means, we will, in this chapter, lay before you for your instruction certain practices which, if properly employed by you, will rob stability of whatever might prove a hindrance to you and will cause you, with the help of God's grace, rapidly to advance in the strait and rugged path which leads up heavenwards.

Make it your business to love solitude, and, as far as you are able, to create around you a solitude in which to dwell. For, only after an indifferent fashion will you be preparing yourself for Religious Life, if, before taking the decisive step, you are eager to satisfy your curiosity by wandering about the streets of the city, by seeking occasions for useless conversations, and by seizing on any excuse to escape from the stillness of your own room. The quiet of the cell and the cloister will weigh like a burthen of lead on the shoulders of him who has given himself unbounded liberty to wander from place to place, to mix with worldly society, to see friends and to be seen by them. The dissipation of

mind which this liberty engenders is bad enough, but the loathing for stability and for solitude which is the consequence of it, the multitude of distracting images which swarm out of it, and the crowd of unruly affections with which it fills the heart, augment its evil results a hundred-fold. Be careful, then, to guard yourself against any distaste for solitude, and in order to add strength to your desire to cultivate quite the opposite taste, consider the examples which, in this respect, the Saints have given you. When the Venerable Jane Mary Bonhomia, an illustrious Sister of our Order, had determined to embrace the Monastic Life, her father wished to take her to see all the wonders and the beauties of Venice, before she for ever bade adieu to the world. He meditated doing this under the erroneous impression that she would afterwards be able more easily to endure the rigours of cloistral life. But the holy maiden, already quite wearied out with these and other amusements of a similar nature, said to him: "I wish to leave the world, because its pleasures and its amusements disgust and weary me. Instead of causing me joy, they fill my soul with bitterness."

In your solitude you must not, however, be idle; for, idleness in solitude is the nurse of melancholy. By the variety of the occupations with which you are busied, your seclusion from the world must, at one and the same time, be made delightful to your soul and fruitful in good works performed for the love of God. Therefore, love work and profitably occupy every moment of precious time. Entertain yourself with God and with His holy Angels. Read such books as will cultivate your mind and fill your heart with sentiments of true Christian piety. Then solitude, instead of being wearisome, will be a never-failing source of the purest joy. In the *Life of St. James Alem*, the Dominican, it is related that even as a boy he was never seen to be idle. When he was obliged to go out and take part in public life, he earnestly besought God to keep a guard over him and to turn away his eyes lest they should gaze on vanity. Of St. Burchard it is told that when his pious parents set him

to study his lessons, he was never seen to indulge in that giddiness and inattention so commonly to be met with in children. He gave himself up to his liberal studies; and when not actually engaged in these, he might be seen either visiting the churches or occupied in the performance of some praiseworthy action which gave a glimpse of the holy spirit with which he was animated. During his youth St. Edmund, Archbishop of Canterbury, was most diligent in the pursuit of learning. He was ever eager to apply himself to study; but he showed far greater eagerness to lead a holy life. He studied as if he was to live for ever; and he lived as if he was presently to die.

Towards those with whom you live, be respectful, gentle, compassionate, and ever on the alert to do them a service. Guard yourself against contracting a disputatious temper of mind, and beware of obstinacy in defending your opinions. By acting thus, you will free yourself from much mental disquiet which, of a certainty, will destroy your peace if you pursue an opposite course. For, as you will have to pass your days in the company of the same Brethren whose dispositions may be quite different from your own, quarrels and heated discussions will naturally break out between you and them, if you pertinaciously adhere to your own notions of things, and if you be ever ready to enter the lists with any one that feels inclined to question these notions. St. Benedict, in his Rule, carefully legislates for all this. The principles which he lays down for our guidance are as follows: "Honour all men. Do not unto another that which you would not have another do unto you. Injure no man, but patiently endure any injury that is done unto you. Speak not ill of those who speak ill of you; on the contrary, speak well of them. Love not contention."\* In another chapter he says: "In honour, prevent, that is to say, be beforehand with one another. Bear patiently with one another's infirmities, whether of body or of mind. Contend with one another in the virtue of obedience. Let no one follow that which he thinketh profitable to himself, but

\* Cap. iv., instr. 8, 9, 30, 32, 46.



rather that which is profitable to another. Show unto one another all brotherly charity, with a chaste love.”\*

If you be careful to make these principles underlie the ordinary actions of your every-day life, you will experience no difficulty, no inconvenience, no annoyance, in having to live with the same persons and to lead with them a common life; on the contrary, you will find it very easy, delightful, and fruitful in many great and singular graces which God will bestow on you. But, in order to secure a permanent influx of these heavenly favours and to make your virtuous actions firm and solid, you must not be induced to perform them through natural motives. You would be acting through such motives as these, if, for example, you were charitable to one of your neighbours, because his disposition is similar to your own; or were deferential to some other, because he is held in high esteem by a wide circle of friends; or were submissive and obedient to some other, because he is thought to be learned, or to be endowed with great natural gifts. Instead of being swayed in your conduct by these or by similar considerations, always endeavour to have a supernatural motive for your actions. Thus, never either pay honour or show respect to those with whom you live, or do them any kindness, or submit your will to them, because of the natural good qualities which you may fancy that you see in them. Set these ideas aside, and in the persons of others consider the image of the great God, impressed on their souls, the price of the ransom with which they were redeemed and the illimitable capacity for eternal beatitude with which they have been endowed. The effect of this motive will be that no one will be shut out from the warmth of your love, even though, to eyes which never look beyond the appearances of things, he may seem to be utterly destitute of every quality that could claim your affection, and to be disfigured by every imperfection that could excite your abhorrence and disgust.

To prepare yourself for the task of “mending your manners,” a task which in Religious Life will be imposed on

\* Cap. lxxii

you, begin at once, without a moment's delay, to uproot and to cast out those evil habits which, at any time, you may have had the misfortune to contract; and encourage yourself, not only once, but frequently during the course of the day, to make greater progress in the love and the service of Almighty God. When St. Aloysius was but seven years of age, he turned with so great eagerness to the worship of his Redeemer and gave himself up with so great earnestness to works of penance, that afterwards he was accustomed to call this period of his life the time of his conversion. We specially commend to your imitation the fervour of our holy Father, even during his childhood, in adoring and in paying homage to God. Also, the intense devotion in the divine service, even in their tenderest years, of St. Placid, of St. Maurus, and of the innumerable other Saints of our Order. This devotion was so great, that never afterwards did they suffer any diminution of its ardour, but, on the contrary, by their exercise of the great theological virtues they daily added fresh fuel to the flames, till at last the heat of these flames melted the link which bound them to life, and set them at liberty to enter into the joy of their Lord.

## CHAPTER VIII

### OF THE POSTULANT'S SOLICITUDE FOR THE WORK OF GOD

#### SECTION I.

##### *Of Penance and the Holy Eucharist.*

SOLICITUDE for the "Work of God" is one of the characteristic marks of a good Novice and of a good Religious. The phrase is a comprehensive one, embracing many excellent qualities. It may be taken to signify a zeal for whatever properly pertains to the worship and the service of God. Therefore, we may classify under it, such works as: frequenting the Sacraments, prayer, hearing Mass, devotion to the Saints, spiritual reading and conversation, examination of conscience, and the acts of the theological virtues. On each of these subjects we will now say a few words which will point out to you what your conduct ought to be with respect to this solicitude for the "Work of God."

A frequent approach to the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist is one of the most ordinary duties of the Religious Life. Therefore, it is only natural to conclude that it should be regarded as a duty incumbent also on those who are desirous of enrolling themselves among the members of any Religious Order. To all these persons it was the advice of Father Lancisius, to go to these sources of grace at least once in each week. For this there are two reasons: First, that by so doing they may be preserved from falling into deadly sins, the dangerous occasions of which present themselves to them well-nigh every day. From these sins



the Holy Sacraments deliver them; for, as St. Bernard says: "One of the effects of the Holy Eucharist is to preserve the will from giving its assent to grievous sin." Secondly, that they may preserve the grace of their vocation, and may more easily and more speedily obtain an entrance into Religious Life.

Yet, even in a matter so excellent as the reception of these Sacraments undoubtedly is, there is a danger against which the young must be especially on their guard. It is that of approaching to these fountains of mercy, out of mere custom, without any piety, or any desire of spiritual progress. Naturally enough, you will ask, how it is that lukewarmness such as this should invade the human heart. It has its origin, we think, in the fact that the reception of these Sacraments is not preceded by that careful preparation which so holy an action imperatively demands. As a natural consequence, the frequent use of them is very apt to degenerate into a mere habit or custom. To hinder this evil in your case, and, if it should unhappily have laid hold of you, to apply to it an effectual remedy, we will now put before you the conditions requisite and the preparation necessary on your part, if, from the frequent use of these Sacraments, you desire to reap that benefit which they are intended to work in your soul.

In the first place, you must fill your mind and your heart with a great esteem and love of these fountains of grace. We need not point out to you all the claims that they have on your profoundest reverence. These claims are very numerous, and books written by learned authors to uphold them are everywhere to be found in abundance. Therefore, passing over much that might be said to enhance your esteem of these Sacraments we will suggest one practice, which will be of great assistance in keeping alive that spirit of awe with which you should approach to receive them. This is, to stir up within yourself a high idea and a deep love of them, by calling to mind and by meditating on all that you are obliged, with the certainty of divine faith, to believe respecting them. This exercise should always be

employed when you are about to approach the Sacrament of Penance or the Sacrament of the most Holy Eucharist.

When preparing to present yourself before the tribunal of Penance, first, with all humility and fervour of soul, implore the divine aid, to enable you worthily to accept its cleansing and healing sentence. Then use moral care and diligence in searching into the inmost folds of your conscience, to discover your sins. But let your chief aim be to elicit, through a supernatural motive, most sincere and heartfelt acts of detestation of and sorrow for sin. After these, make a firm resolve never again to offend God. These acts constitute the chief elements of the Sacrament of Penance. They must not be made in an offhand, careless sort of way ; and to hinder this from happening, we advise you to write down those supernatural motives which, from past experience, you know have most weight in moving your will to repent. When you are about to confess, put these motives before your mind and ponder on them with deep and earnest thought. Also, it will be advisable, every time that you approach this Sacrament, not only to make a general purpose of avoiding sin and the dangerous occasions which lead to it, but also to set before yourself either some definite fault, or some particular imperfection which must be corrected. When you have done this, select those means which, with the aid of God's grace, will enable you to carry your resolve into effect.

When you are actually about to go to confession, endeavour to remember that excellent piece of advice which is given to us by St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi : " With much thought and with great reverence approach the holy Sacrament of Penance. For, you are going to receive the blood of the Incarnate Word. By means of the Priest's absolution, that blood is poured into the vessel of your soul. On the instant you are vested with a dignity so august and a beauty so radiant, so resplendent that, if you could see yourself, you would feel inclined to fall down and adore." In the same chapter she says : " To make your confession pleasing to God, reveal your sins in a way that will cover

you with confusion; and bear in mind that, in that confession and by the words of absolution, you are washed in the blood of Jesus Christ." Towards the end she says: "Let your confession be made frequently; let it be made with great exactitude; let your preparation for it be full of diligence; and let the actual avowal of your sins be made with a heart that is bowed down with shame." It is well to take particular notice of this last-named quality; for, best is the confession that fills us with the greatest confusion and sorrow for our sins. The remaining conditions for a good confession may be found in any book of instruction on this subject.

The penance imposed perform with great exactitude, in the fulness of a contrite heart, and with gratitude to God for the pardon which He has bestowed. After you have made your thanksgiving, endeavour, by leading a devout life, to amend the evil which you have committed in the past.

Lastly, if you can possibly do so, choose for your Confessor an upright, learned, and prudent man. Confess to him and do not lightly change him for another. Be not ashamed to lay open before him your secret self. Have for him the greatest possible reverence as the father, physician, and judge of your soul. Obey him without hesitation, as the Vicar of God, and as one who is solicitous for your advancement in the paths of perfection.

Having said thus much of the Sacrament of Penance, let us now turn our attention to the Holy Eucharist.

One of the best preparations for the worthy reception of Holy Communion is an exceedingly great purity of conscience. All other preparations, without this, are of little avail. Hence, particular care must be taken by those who are about to approach the Holy Table, to draw nigh to it, not only without being conscious of any grievous sin, but without having any affection to venial sin. Their minds should be quite free from any inordinate passion of the flesh, which ever tends to indulge in that which delights and pleases the bodily senses of man. Aptly, therefore, does St. Laurence Justinian say: "The purer the mind is,



the closer is its union with God. The more the heart is cleansed from the filth of sin, the more lowly in its own opinion, the more fervent in divine love, the more eager in the pursuit of virtue, the more holy in life, the better it is prepared to receive that all-holy body of the Lord Who gave Himself up to death in order to redeem us.

On the evening before the day on which you are about to communicate, make your preparation in this, or in some similar manner. Either before you retire to rest, or at any time that you find most convenient, reflect on the ardent desire which Jesus has to be united with you by means of the most Holy Sacrament. Then conceive in your heart an intense longing to receive Him, and in these sentiments await the approach of sleep. During the day which precedes your Communion, not only abstain from the smallest act that could in anyway defile your conscience, but begin to adorn your soul for the reception of your Divine Guest, by fervent acts of the various virtues, and particularly by acts of lively faith, hope, charity, contrition, and humility. Let your conversation be of holy things. Let the reading of some devout book fill your mind with good thoughts, and let some slight mortification at table remind you of the heavenly banquet of which you are so soon to partake.

In the morning, as soon as you awake, rise with joyous alacrity, and immediately direct your mind to the consideration of the great privilege which is awaiting you. It was the practice of St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi to do this, not only on the morning of Holy Communion, but also during the night which preceded it; for, if her slumber chanced to be broken, her first reflection always was: "I am going to the Holy Table."

Whenever this happiness is granted to you, be careful to approach the treasury of mercy with the utmost purity of intention. In this all-holy act, seek only the greater glory of God, closer union with Him, pardon of your manifold sins, victory over your temptations, progress in virtue, protection against a relapse into sin, and perseverance till death in faithfully accomplishing the duties of your calling.

When the time of Communion draws nigh, call to mind and endeavour to follow the counsel given to us by St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi : " For some few moments before Holy Communion, meditate on and try to fill your whole soul with this astounding truth : ' He Whom I am going to receive is God ! ' The little profit which is gained from the frequent eating of this heavenly bread is the result of the little thought which is given to its sublime nature. We do not think sufficiently about it, and consequently we fail to realise the stupendous privilege which is accorded to us, in being suffered to draw nigh to and to receive into our bosoms, the great Almighty God ! " A little farther on, she says : " Take this food, as Jesus bids you, in memory of Him and of His bitter Passion."

You must approach this sacred banquet with a composure of the outward senses, and a modesty as great as the unspeakable Majesty which lies concealed beneath its mean elements requires and imperatively demands.

The following words of St. Mary Magdalene will tell you what you ought to do after you have partaken of this heavenly feast : " When you have received the Lord into your bosom, try so to depend on Him, as if in the world there was nothing else than Christ crucified." These few moments, during which you hold the Omnipotent a prisoner, are the most opportune for treating with Him about that which, for you, is the one thing necessary ; they are the best for listening to His sweet accents of love ; they constitute the most favourable time for devoting yourself to His service. He Who is your guest is God ! Therefore, with all the power of your soul, attend unto that which He says to you. He who has Jesus for his Master needs no other book from which to learn, no other teacher from whom to look for knowledge. During these few blissful moments, give full scope to all the loving affections of your heart. Praise Him for His mercy ; thank Him for His graces ; resign yourself into His hands to be disposed of at His good pleasure ; offer yourself a willing victim to suffer any tribulation that may serve to advance His glory ; with all the

intensity of your will, desire to worship the Blessed Trinity by means of the most Holy Sacrament, and to give aid unto the whole world.

By constant watchfulness over your heart, throughout the rest of the day of your Communion, endeavour to make that day holy unto the Lord. Suffer not any trouble to ruffle the calm of your soul, lest God depart from you ; for, " the Lord is not in commotion. Very often repeat to yourself: " I have this day received my Lord and my God ! "

Lastly, always make one Communion a preparation for the one which is to succeed it. By this advice we mean that, after you have communicated, you should be watchful over yourself, until the time arrives for once again receiving your Divine Guest.

It is to be hoped that you will try to put in practice these various counsels which we have given you with respect to Holy Communion. To encourage you to do this, we will lay before you, from the *Life of St. Aloysius*, one other example, in which you will see, as in a mirror, with what fervour of devotion a soul that truly seeks God, and that is solicitous for His divine service, prepares itself to receive these holy Sacraments.

When at Florence, this saintly boy went to confession more frequently than was his custom, and laid bare before the eyes of the Rector of the College all the secrets of his inmost soul. In doing this, he was full of reverence towards his Spiritual Guide ; and he showed as great a modesty of demeanour and a disdain of self as if he was a sinner of the deepest dye, as if he had surpassed all other men in the multitude and the heinousness of crimes. On one occasion, the consciousness of his unworthiness to appear in the sight of God so far overcame him that, as he cast himself on his knees at the feet of his Confessor, he swooned away, and he had to be raised by his tutor and conducted back to his rooms. It was from this time that he began to lead a stricter kind of life. For this purpose he made it a practice studiously to search into all his actions, in order mercilessly to weed out any fault that he discovered striking its roots



down into the heart of them. This daily scrutiny caused him to perceive in his character a certain tendency to the vice of anger. As soon as he became aware of this tendency, he applied himself so vigorously to check it, that, throughout the rest of his life, no one could detect in him the slightest trace of this passion.

Whenever he was about to approach the Holy Table, his appearance, his words, his acts, breathed naught but a most deep consciousness of the great honour and the happiness that he was about to receive. Several priests, perceiving the glowing ardour of his love for this divine Sacrament, made it a practice, on these days, to converse with him, and they avowed that on the following morning their celebration of the heavenly mysteries was more devout than usual, in consequence of the warmth of devotion which his example had infused into their breasts. Filled with holy thoughts and with burning desires to receive the great Guest Whom he was about to entertain on the Sunday, this youthful Saint used to retire to rest on the Saturday night. As soon as he awoke his mind at once began to think of Him Whom his soul loved best. Then for an hour before receiving Holy Communion he meditated on the admirable union effected by the Eucharist between Jesus Christ and the devout soul. As soon as this time had elapsed, he went to the church to hear Mass, during which he knelt as immovable as a statue. Approaching the Altar, he received from the hands of the priest the body of his Lord and God, and then, retiring to some quiet corner, cast himself on his knees and prayed as one does who has neither sense nor motion. It was with difficulty that he rose from his knees and tore himself away from the presence of the tabernacle. His reluctant steps told how painful it was for him to quit the courts of the Lord. To those who looked on him, the radiance of his countenance spoke of the sweetness and the unspeakable delight with which his soul was inundated, by the presence within it of Jesus Christ. During the rest of the morning he gave himself up to silent prayer, to meditation, and to devout reading, taken chiefly from the works of St. Bernard or of St. Augustine.

## SECTION II.

*Prayer, Hearing Mass, and Devotion to the Saints.*

In the fourth chapter of the Rule, St. Benedict tells his children that one of the great means of perfection is oftentimes to give themselves up to devout prayer. Not only in this chapter, but in many other passages, he so arranges everything that all his enactments tend to help them most religiously to recite the Divine Office both by day and by night and unceasingly to occupy their minds with God. See, therefore, that you neglect not to exercise yourself in mental prayer as well as in vocal prayer, and by every other means within your reach, to stir up in your heart a true spirit of solid piety. In order to help you to do this, we will suggest to you a few practices, which will contribute very much towards developing within you a spirit so indispensable in one who aims at leading the Religious Life.

For your various prayers and practices of piety have fixed and stated times, and see that for each of these practices you have the approval of your Spiritual Director. Among the many exercises by which men worship and serve God, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass holds the chief place. You ought never to let slip any opportunity of being present at it; and while assisting at these tremendous mysteries, the external reverence of your body and the internal reverence of your mind ought to be fed by your attentive consideration of that which lies concealed beneath the outward forms which appeal to your senses.

Take the trouble to say with piety and devotion, your morning and your night prayers; do not thoughtlessly hurry over the grace either before or after meals; be particularly careful to say the "Angelus" with reverence, and never omit to pray for the dying and the dead, when the "passing bell" warns you either that a soul is trembling on the brink of eternity, or that it has already winged its flight to the judgment-seat of God. If these holy practices are not performed in this way—that is to say, with attention and

devotion—they become a merely mechanical lip-service which is worthless in the sight of God.

However, do not be content with vocal prayer only, but accustom yourself to mental prayer also. For this purpose, for at least a quarter of an hour after you rise in the morning, endeavour to meditate on some of the mysteries of Our Lord's life; and in the evening try to occupy yourself in the same devout exercise, always making at the end of it some particular resolution which you must endeavour to carry into effect. St. Theresa tells us that she derived incalculable benefit from thinking, for a short time before she retired to rest, that in the Garden of Olives, Jesus lay on the ground, covered with the sweat of blood which His agony had forced from Him. She did not, at the time when she was accustomed to do this, know anything about the exercise of meditation, and yet the unwitting practice of it enriched her with innumerable graces and favours.

You will make a most useful and most lucrative mental prayer if, throughout the course of the day, you offer to God intimately present within you, each of the actions which you perform, by often and with great affection of heart, turning to Him to ask for some fresh gift, to thank Him for past graces and in various other ways humbly and reverently to hold converse with Him, and wholly to resign yourself to the disposal of His holy will. For, as St. Theresa, in her "Mistress of Mental Prayer," says: "Mental prayer is nothing else than a friendly conversation with God, by Whom we know that we are most tenderly beloved." Therefore, have a high esteem of it. No words can adequately describe the priceless value of the fruit which springs from it. Only personal experience can do this for us, and in a way far more persuasive than it is possible for any merely human eloquence to make it evident to us.

With respect to your devotion to the Saints of God, you must remember that, first of all, both before and above everything else, supreme worship must be given to the Holy and undivided Trinity; then to Jesus Christ Who suffered for us and Who is ever present with us in the most Holy



Sacrament of the Altar. When this important duty has been accomplished, you may pay your meed of reverential homage to the Saints of God. Chief among these and most deserving of your filial devotion, is the most blessed Virgin, Mother of God, Queen of heaven and of earth. After her, you should choose, from among the glorious citizens of the kingdom of heaven, some particular Saints to be your patrons, your guides, and your intercessors before the throne of mercy. Your Guardian Angel, St. Joseph, and St. Benedict undoubtedly claim from you a special love and service. Forget not, in this your devotion to the Saints, those holy souls who have passed out of this world and who, on account of their imperfections, are detained in the penal fires of Purgatory. Pray also for those who are living in the deplorable state of mortal sin, for the dying, and for those who are labouring under any corporal or under any spiritual trial, or difficulty, or necessity.

It would be superfluous, on our part, to point out to you the various motives which should animate you in each of these acts; for, we take it for granted that you are both sufficiently well instructed not to need, in this respect, any counsel from us, and so exceedingly well disposed to perform all these acts of piety, as not to require from us any urging or any further exhortation.

Therefore, passing over all these motives, of which you will find an abundance in any spiritual book, we will offer a few suggestions which may be of service to you in regulating your devotion to the various Saints and to the great Lord of all the heavenly hosts.

Your devotion to the Blessed Trinity will best be manifested by a child-like faith in all that the Church teaches concerning this adorable mystery. In the next place, pay most profound reverence to the omnipresent personality of God. In everything that you do pertaining to the divine worship, let there be apparent an exceedingly great fervour and devotion. When you make the sign of the Cross and when you bow at the "Glory be to the Father," perform both these acts with great reverence and

with profound adoration of the most Holy Trinity. Both in prosperous and in adverse circumstances, with all confidence resign yourself into the hands of Divine Providence which, with infinite wisdom and goodness, disposes and arranges all things.

Cultivate a great devotion to the bitter Passion of Our Lord; and, in order that this devotion may be true and solid, daily meditate on some portion of that sorrowful history which the Evangelists have written for our instruction. Unite whatever you do with the meritorious actions which Our Saviour performed during those hours of intense agony.

Whenever you see an image of Christ crucified, pay it reverence; ask of God a blessing on yourself through the sufferings of His only-begotten Son, and lovingly kiss the five wounds which speak to you with such mute eloquence. When you retire to rest, let your place of repose be in the wounds of Him Who has so tenderly loved you; and, as you lie in bed, fold your arms over your bosom in the form of a Cross and thus compose yourself to sleep. Whenever the temptations of the devil assail you, flee for refuge to those same wounds of your Lord, and in them you will find a sure place of safety against the seductive power which temptation possesses over our fallen nature.

Besides being devout to Our Lord's Passion, you must cultivate an ardent affection for the most holy mystery of the Blessed Eucharist. You will fill your heart with the requisite sentiments, with respect to this compendium of all God's wonderful works, by always preparing with great devotion and with burning love for the reception of this adorable Sacrament; by frequently making spiritual Communions, especially during the time of Holy Mass; by once or twice during the course of each day, visiting the Prisoner of the Tabernacle; by internally adoring Him, every time that you bend your knee before the Altar on which He reposes; by having recourse to Him in your necessities, your doubts, and your difficulties; by frequently saying: "Blessed be Jesus in the most Holy Sacrament of the Altar."

Show your child-like love of and your devotion to our dearest Mother Mary, by commending yourself, both in the morning and in the evening, to her maternal protection ; by saying the "Ave Maria" in her honour every time that the clock strikes ; by daily protesting to this loving Mother that you are her son, her servant, her slave ; by uncovering your head whenever you pass her statue and by bowing whenever her name is mentioned ; by striving to imitate her in her three special virtues—humility, charity, and chastity ; by having recourse to her for protection in time of temptation ; by every day reciting at least some portion of her Rosary ; by performing some good work in preparation for her festivals ; and by devoting Saturdays and the other days consecrated to her, to the exercise of works of piety.

Be devout to your Guardian Angel ; everywhere remember his presence with you, even when you seem to be alone ; and reverence him by never being guilty of any act, or of any thought, or of any word that would, in the least degree, cause him displeasure. Often thank him for his faithful custody of you ; in temptation call to him for aid, and be on the alert to catch and to follow out his whispered inspirations.

Also, cherish in your heart a great devotion to your Patron Saints. In each of them fix your eyes on some particular virtue which you must endeavour to imitate. Thus, in St. Joseph, select for imitation, purity of heart ; in St. Aloysius, modesty ; in St. Maurus, obedience. Oftentimes thank God for all the graces that He has bestowed on them. As their festival days come round, make a diligent preparation to spend them well, and by works of piety devoutly reverence these Saints when their feasts are kept by the Church. In all your necessities, lovingly have recourse to the Saint whose name you bear. During the course of each week you may honour and reverence the Saints, by some such method as the following :

On Sunday, turn all your attention to the worship of the most Holy Trinity. Let Monday be devoted to your Guardian Angel. Tuesday will serve to celebrate the



glorious graces and favours bestowed on St. Benedict. Wednesday may be given to St. Joseph. Thursday should be consecrated to the worship of the most Holy Sacrament. Friday will recall the bitter Passion of Our divine Lord. Saturday must end your week of prayer, by the devout exercises with which you will honour our Lady, the ever-blessed Mother of God.

In order to hinder your devotion to God and to the Saints from being a mere piece of formality, a lip-service and nothing more, frequently and with great fervour of soul offer to the most Holy Trinity, the merits of the holy life and the bitter Passion of Jesus Christ. Do this especially during the Holy Sacrifice; whenever you are in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament; and after each of your Communions. It was by these means that St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi brought many sinners back from their evil ways to a life of virtue, and freed countless holy souls from the cleansing fires of Purgatory. Constantly exercise yourself in the use of ejaculatory prayers, and in these prayers recommend to God your various friends and all their troubles and necessities. Endeavour to help others in their difficulties and trials, chiefly by means of your own edifying example, and, whenever circumstances permit, by your pious and earnest exhortations. If you can prevail on others to join you in these holy exercises, by all means try to do so, and induce them to offer to God their prayers and their virtuous actions that by them their fellow-Christians may obtain help. Should you desire, with a sincere affection of charity, to offer up all the fruit of your good works and of your devotions, for the suffering souls who are commonly thought to be unable to help themselves, you will do a work most pleasing to God, most beneficial to the souls of those who are awaiting their deliverance, and most profitable to yourself. Such charity cannot fail to merit an exceedingly great reward; and the gratitude of those who, through your suffrages, are admitted to the joys of heaven, will make them plead unceasingly for you before the throne of God.

## SECTION III.

*Spiritual Reading, Examination of Conscience, Exercise of the Three Theological Virtues.*

To keep alive the spirit of your vocation and to preserve in their first fervour the good dispositions of your heart towards Religious Life, you must provide spiritual nutriment for your soul by holy reading, by edifying conversation, by daily examination of conscience, and by frequent repetition of the acts of the great theological virtues—faith, hope, and charity. It is by these means that the soul is fed with that which maintains its inward life; is inflamed with holy desires; and is trained to the practice of good. But, since the use of these various implements for advancing in perfection is one of the commonest and most ordinary duties of Cloistral Life, you should prepare yourself to derive all possible advantage from them by daily reading a few pages of some standard spiritual work; by never neglecting to examine your conscience; by often making acts of faith, hope, and charity; and, if an occasion presents itself, by engaging in holy conversation with those from whom you may gain wisdom.

Two things are requisite to render spiritual reading profitable: it should be made without curiosity and without haste; for, curiosity and haste are two elements which put an effectual stop to the growth of any fruit that might otherwise spring from devout reading. Therefore, when you take up any spiritual work, let your only end be to improve your soul in the knowledge and love of God. Slowly peruse these pages and thoughtfully dwell on the matter which they present for your consideration. After finishing two or three paragraphs, pause for a short time to let the truth which they tell sink into your mind. This pause will enable you to stir up the affection of your heart; you will form strong resolves to do the good to the practice of which the book exhorts you, and to avoid the evil against which it warns you to be on your guard. If you read the life of a Saint, mark well by

what principles he guided himself in the way of life; by what spirit he was led onward; with what affection and with what promptitude his will impelled him to act for God; what he did and what he left undone; with what grace, consolation, and repose of conscience his actions and his sufferings were crowned; with what increase of merit they were performed and with what glory they were rewarded. Ask yourself: "If this Saint were placed in circumstances precisely similar to those in which I am at this moment, in what way would he conduct himself? By what principles, by what affections would he guide himself? In what manner would he act? If I were placed in circumstances similar to those in which the Saint found himself, how would I act?" In this way you will learn in what your principles, your affections, and your methods of action are defective, and also what that is which imparts to the principles, the affections and the methods of action pursued by the Saints, their perfection and their exceedingly great worth. If, however, the history of the Saint's life recounts some impure temptation to which he was subjected, you must be careful not to place yourself in imagination in the circumstances in which he found himself. For, to do this, would at once bring before you that enemy who is overcome chiefly by flight. It would cause you to be assaulted with a similar storm of passion, brought on by your own fault, and, consequently, exceedingly dangerous, because God usually does not bestow His all-powerful grace on those who thrust themselves into danger. He has promised this aid to those who are, as it were, caught in these tempests, and not to those who steer themselves into the regions in which they abound. Therefore, in your reflections on that which you read, never place before your imagination any images that would fan into a flame within you the smouldering fires of concupiscence. In your choice of books, be guided by the advice of your Confessor. Such works as the "Following of Christ," the "Introduction to the Devout Life," and the "Lives of Saints," will always meet with his approval.

You ought, from time to time, to hold a spiritual confer-



ence with your ghostly father, or with some priest approved of by him. Also, we would recommend you to speak of pious and holy subjects with your companions and fellow-students. The conference with your ghostly father is necessary, in order to preserve your vocation from the many hurtful influences which are brought to bear upon it, and also to enable you, while in the world, to lead a pure and perfect life. During the course of your interview with him, lay open before him the whole state of your soul and particularly the temptations which assail its purity. Give him a clear insight into its inclinations and propensities, whether these are good or evil. Ask his advice about the difficulties which you meet in your daily life, and let your aim be to leave nothing hidden in your conscience, but to make him look into its most secret depths. The advantage of candour such as this, is that you will never be entangled in the snares of the devil, who entraps with the appearance of good the self-sufficient, the secret, and the reticent.

The subject-matter of your spiritual conversations with others may be the last four things, the endless duration of eternity, and the brilliant examples of every species of virtue left us by the Saints. In these subjects you will find a superabundance of materials for your conversations with your companions.\* St. Theresa, in her early youth, was so inflamed with the love of Jesus, in consequence of a conversation which she had had with her young brother that, in order to prove her love for Christ, she set out with him, hand in hand, to seek martyrdom among the Saracens. She tells us that she filled her heart with great fervour by frequently repeating the words: "For ever and ever." If you make a judicious use of your conversation, you will exercise a very salutary influence on those with whom you are brought in contact; and the result of that influence will oftentimes be more fruitful than is that produced by eloquent

\* It is advisable that the young should never obtrude these topics upon others of their own age. Provided that their conversations are pure and innocent, it is to be desired that they should leave these matters alone.

sermons, of which the immediate end has been to persuade and to convert.

With respect to examination of conscience which we said is one of the means for preserving in you the spirit of your vocation, bear in mind that there are two kinds—the one general, the other particular. The general examination is made at the end of each day and in the following manner. First, there is offered up to God an act of thanksgiving for all the benefits received from the divine bounty, especially during the course of that day. Secondly, a humble petition for aid to perform in a suitable manner this salutary action, is next presented before the throne of mercy. Thirdly, an inquiry is made into all the acts of the day and also into the omissions of which we have been guilty, to see what we have done amiss and what we have altogether left undone, with respect to God, to our neighbour, and to ourselves. The examination is then concluded with a very sincere act of sorrow for that which we have done amiss, and with a firm purpose of amendment of the faults which we have committed. It is most necessary that these last two acts should be made with the utmost care and fervour, because it is in these that the whole virtue of the examination consists.

The object of the particular examination is to correct some special fault which you perceive to be more hurtful to you than is any one of the rest. The way to make this examination is, first, every morning to invoke the divine aid to enable you to avoid that one fault which you habitually commit, or to practise that one virtue in which you are accustomed most frequently to fail; secondly, to take certain means for avoiding that fault during the course of the day and for practising that virtue; thirdly, to notice the number of faults of which you are guilty in these various acts, about which you made your resolve in the morning.

We will conclude this chapter with a few words on the method of which you may make use to practise the acts of the three theological virtues—faith, hope, and charity.

Before you can fruitfully exercise your faith, you must labour to acquire a sufficient knowledge of the various

dogmas revealed by God and proposed for our belief by Holy Church. Then make a point of frequently eliciting many acts of this virtue, through the motive upon which it rests. This motive is nothing else than the authority of Him Who reveals to us that which is the object of our faith, Who neither can deceive nor can He be deceived. Acquire the habit of living a life of faith, by never resting in the natural things with which you are surrounded, but by using them as so many steps by which to ascend to that which is supernatural. Thus, when during the night-time you raise your eyes to the heavens above your head and see the sky all ablaze with multitudinous glittering stars, or when, during the day-time, you behold the earth "in verdure clad" and decked out with its variegated robe of many-coloured flowers, adore, with your mind illuminated by a living faith, the omnipotence, the wisdom, and the goodness of Him Who created all these wondrous works of nature. Whenever your ear is charmed by sweet music, think of the strains of angelic minstrelsy which flood the courts of heaven, and then sigh after your beloved fatherland. Whenever your palate is regaled with luscious viands, think of the hunger and the thirst of the souls in Purgatory, of the vinegar and the gall which Christ had to taste on Calvary, and thus in many other ways endeavour not to rest in the report of things which the material creation presents to your soul. This report will not guide you aright to see the utter emptiness and worthlessness of earthly things, or to pronounce on them the judgment which their hollowness deserves. Look at them in the brilliant light with which faith illuminates all things; see in what way the Saints behaved with respect to them and revolve in your mind the words which Christ spoke about them. He did not deem men happy because they were rolling in wealth, because they were honoured by the world, because they were living in the enjoyment of that which is usually considered to be most deserving of the pursuit of the worldly wise. No; He acted and thought in a way exactly the reverse of that in which the world acts and thinks. Therefore, live according to that which faith dictates,



and not according to that which the senses report to you. Highly esteem everything that in any way has reference to faith, although to the eyes of worldlings it may seem to be a trifle beneath the notice of a sensible man. Consequently, reverence all the rites and the ceremonies of the Church; hold in great respect the use of holy water; and be most devout in your employment of the other Sacramentals instituted for our benefit by that most loving Mother.\*

In exercising the virtue of hope, remember that its essential motive consists in this, that God is supremely good, most faithful in accomplishing that which He has promised, most powerful in carrying it into effect, most wise in knowing all our needs and most merciful in having pity on us. In order to exercise this virtue, raise your eyes and contemplate your heavenly fatherland; regard it as the goal of all your soul's aspirations, the resting-place in which you will find eternal repose and happiness. To realise this truth, you must use both the ordinary and the extraordinary means provided by God for this purpose. Trust not in your own strength; for, of yourself and without the aid of divine grace, you are not able to do even the least act that is meritorious of eternal life. Never let your happiness depend on any temporal thing whatever: "Put not your trust in princes; in the children of men, in whom there is no safety."† In adversity, in tribulation, in temptation, in necessity, either spiritual or corporal, never despair, but rest secure in the hope of a divine reward, saying with the Apostle: "I can do all things in Him Who strengtheneth me."‡ "Patience worketh trial, and trial hope, and hope confoundeth not."§ "My children, behold the generations of men; and know ye that no one hath hoped in the Lord and hath been confounded."||

\* Theologians usually give six *Sacramentals*: the Lord's Prayer, or others prescribed by the Church; holy water; blessed bread; the *Confiteor*; alms; the blessing of a Bishop or of an Abbot. These are called Sacramentals, because they bear some similitude to the Sacraments, in that they procure the remission of venial sin, whereas the Sacraments procure for us the grace which justifies.—Billuart, *De Sacram.*, dissert. vii., art. iv.

† Ps. cxlv. 2, 3.

§ Rom. v. 4.

‡ Philip. iv. 13.

|| Eccclus. ii. 11.

Reject as injurious to God all thoughts that tend to lessen your confidence in Him—and to generate faintheartedness. On the contrary, cherish all those thoughts that beget courage, joyousness in His service, and increase of hope in Him. This was the advice which Father Lancisius gave to those who were about to enter the Novitiate. Take it to yourself, act on it, and never despair of the mercy of God.

Finally, the essential motive of charity is the supremely infinite goodness of God in Himself, without any respect whatever to us. The chief acts of this virtue are two in number: the love of God above all things, for His own sake; and the love of our neighbour, for God's sake. We exercise charity or love with respect to God, by observing the Commandments which He has imposed on us; for, Our Lord says: "He that hath My Commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me;"\* by conforming in all things our will with the will of God; by continually endeavouring to advance from that which is good to that which is better. This kind of love of God is the best and most solid. To the manifestation of this love towards Our Creator, all our internal affections and our desires must tend; then it will in very truth be profitable to whomsoever shall elicit it.

As we have already, in this third section, treated of the obligation of charity towards our neighbour, we will content ourselves with here referring you to that which we have said on this subject.

\* *St. John* xiv. 21.

## CHAPTER IX

### HUMILITY, PATIENCE, MODESTY

#### SECTION I.

##### *Humility.*

NEXT in importance after the theological virtues, the vows and all those other matters that pertain to the virtue of Religion, are humility, patience, modesty, and a knowledge of the manner in which you ought to treat your body. Therefore, it is not enough, that you should practise only those virtues of which we have already spoken ; you must, while you are yet living in the world, make every effort to lay in your soul the solid foundations of those also which are mentioned at the head of this chapter.

In order to aid you in your endeavour to accomplish this work, we will say a few words on each of these virtues.

We have already told you, in the third chapter of this little work, that St. Benedict considers the spirit of his Institute to consist in obedience joined with humility. To any one that reads the Holy Rule this is manifest ; for, almost every page inculcates these two virtues, and commends to us the exercise of them.

If any doubt whatever existed as to the truth of this statement, it would at once be set at rest by a perusal of the fifty-eighth chapter, in which our holy Father, in precise terms, tells us what manner of man he ought to be who aspires to join this Order ; for, he says that no one must even be admitted into the Monastery until he has been tried in humility, and until he has patiently borne with the scant courtesy purposely dealt out to him. In what acts, then,



ought you to exercise yourself, while you are still living in the world, in order that by the practice of them, you may make yourself fit to enter Religious Life? These shall at once be laid before you.

Whatever good you may seem to possess, in natural or in supernatural gifts, attribute it all, without any exception, to God; for, it is from Him that whatever is good and perfect cometh down. This is the counsel which St. Benedict gives to each of his followers: "When you see any good in yourself, attribute it to God, and not to yourself; but know that evil is done by yourself; therefore, attribute it to yourself."\* Consequently, if God has endowed you with brilliant talents, or bestowed on you a happy disposition, or surrounded you with wealth, or crowned you with success in study, or with a rapid advance in virtue, do not foolishly imagine that aught of this is owing to yourself; do not, on account of it, take any vain complacency in yourself and prefer yourself to others. On the contrary, humbly acknowledge that all these are the gratuitous favours of God; be thankful to your liberal benefactor and offer to Him whatever glory may be reflected on you by the possession of His gifts.

Never prefer yourself to any one, no matter how worthless, or despicable, or abject he may seem to be. Instead of being guilty of this folly, be ready not only to admit by word of mouth, but to believe in your very heart, that you are not superior to any one.† To enable you to do this, bear in mind these words of St. Gregory the Great: "The more worthless a soul is in its own eyes, the more precious it is in the eyes of God. Hence, it was said to Saul: 'When thou wast a little one in thy own eyes, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel?' That is to say: Thou wast great in My estimation when thou wast little in thy own; but now that thou seemest to thyself to be something, to Me thou art as nothing. Therefore, it is that I say, the more precious a man is in his own estimation, the more worthless he is in the estimation of God. Consequently, if

\* *Reg.*, cap. iv., instr. 42, 43.

† *Cap.* vii., grad. 7.

you wish to be of some account with Him, be not of any account with yourself.”\*

“You incur no risk whatever,” says St. Bernard, “by thinking yourself to be far below others; but not only you incur a very grave danger, you bring on yourself a positive evil by exalting yourself even a little above any one else, and that too, even in thought, since Truth Himself may see that the person whom you thus set beneath yourself is in every respect your superior. Therefore, compare not yourself with those who are greater, or with those who are less, or with those who are equal, or with any one at all.”†

If you should chance to be accused of any fault, or to be corrected for any misdemeanour, do not excuse yourself; but particularly do not incur the guilt of a lie to shield yourself from punishment, or to preserve the esteem in which you are held. Rather than do this and thus lose an opportunity of gaining a victory over yourself, be ready to endure any ill whatever. St. John Climacus tells us of a certain Macedonius who, for not returning to the Monastery on the day appointed by the Superior, was deprived of his rank in the Community and placed last among those who had but recently come to Religious Life. Without a murmur he accepted the penalty, as if some other person had been punished. For forty days he remained in the lowest place; but during all that time, as he afterwards declared, his soul was flooded with graces so great and he was in a state of peace so profound, that he could not call to mind any period of his life during which he had been so highly favoured by God. No such graces as these will ever flow into the soul of him who, with some wretched excuse, strives to hide every defect and shrinks like a craven from incurring any confusion for Christ’s sake.

Be not angry with those who unjustly accuse, or correct, or punish, or in any other way do you an injury. If you cannot with a willing and gladsome heart bear these trials, endure them with a heart that is at least patient. Thus

\* *Moralia*, lib. xviii., cap. 22.

† *Sermo* 37.

acted that Father of the Desert who, although well able to repel the revilings of those who railed against him, yet, with a strong mind, preferred to bear them, that he might thus accustom himself, by patiently suffering little ills, to encounter and to bear those which are greater. It is men of this stamp that St. Benedict wishes all his children to be; for, in the fourth chapter of his Rule, he tells them: "Not to render evil for evil; not to do any injury, but patiently to endure any injury done to them; to love their enemies; not to speak ill of those who speak ill of them, but, on the contrary, to speak well of them."\* In order to nerve yourself to do these deeds of Christian charity, look on the face of Jesus Christ of Whom the blessed Angela of Foligno writes: "The second company with which Our Lord was ever associated as long as He lived, were scorn, ignominy, and shame. For, He lived as if He was an abject and slave; not as a ransomed slave, but as one who had been sold into slavery. Worse still, as a slave that is reputed wicked. For, He was driven into exile; He was loaded with reproaches; He was derided, bound with cords, struck by the hard fists of His enemies, cruelly scourged, and at last put to a most disgraceful death, without having any one to utter a word in His defence; just as if He was some worthless, miserable wretch, fit to be ranked only among criminals—and like them to be thrust out of the world as being unworthy to live. When any one, during the days of His mortal pilgrimage, wished to confer on Him some temporal honour, He invariably refused it, either by word or by deed. He fled from the honour which the world, at times, felt compelled to offer to Him, but gladly went to meet and to embrace the shame which it heaped on His head. He accepted the shame, indeed, but without in any way either giving occasion to it, or being the cause of it."

Attentively consider all these facts, and in your measure strive to imitate that which Jesus Christ did. If you do this, you will present yourself for reception into Religious

\* Instr. 29, 30, 31, 32.



Life, adorned with those virtues and endowed with those qualities which St. Benedict so ardently desires to see in the hearts of those who wish to embrace his Institute.

## SECTION II.

### *Patience.*

Speaking of those who wish to join his Order, St. Benedict says: "Let all the rigour and the austerity by which we tend to God be laid before them."\* Therefore, it is necessary for you to make up your mind to carry the Cross, if you wish to lead the life of a Religious. Do not believe those who tell you that, in the Cloister, you will find that which is grateful to self-love, pleasing to sense, and easy to the natural man. If you do, you will be filled with trouble when you discover, as you most certainly will discover, that just the reverse will be your portion; and you will be tempted to say: "I never expected such things." You will chafe under your trials; and, perhaps, at last quite worn out with the irritation which they engender, you will return to the worldly life which you had renounced. Therefore, manfully take up the Cross of Christ, and, coming to the service of God, prepare your soul for temptation. For, unless you undertake that service with some such disposition as this, and unless like your Divine Model, Jesus Christ, you be prepared to suffer very many things painful to flesh and blood—from Superiors, from equals, and from inferiors—either you will not persevere, or, in your Religious Life, you will be in a perpetual state of worry and agitation of mind. Therefore, be prepared for these trials, and you will be a true and living member of the Religious Body.

That this preparation may be real and efficacious, it is not enough for you to resolve, at some future time of Religious Life, patiently to endure these trials. You must have a practical experience of them. You must put the Cross on your shoulder by performing, while you are still in the

\* *Reg.*, cap. lviii.

world, some of the following actions, or of actions similar to them.

Frequently and fervently beseech God to give you the spirit of suffering much for love of Him. For, as suffering of any kind is very repugnant to our nature, you must by humble prayer, beseech Him to supply by the aid of divine grace, that force which your nature of itself is unable to put forth.

When adversities crowd in upon you, do not lose courage, or give over your good purposes; "for," as St. Thomas says, "the good of patience consists in this, that it enables us not to abandon the practice of virtue because of the troubles which are brought on us by others, no matter how great those troubles may be."\* No doubt, some persons will call you a devotee, a would-be saint, even a hypocrite, if you strive exactly to observe all the various counsels contained in this little work. They will, perhaps, avoid your company, shun your conversation and in many other ways cause you annoyance. But do not be so weak-minded as to be overcome by such paltry persecutions. Rather be all the more persistent in your pious practices, because of the slight opposition which these men put in your way. Endeavour with greater perfection to accomplish your various duties, and do not abandon your good undertakings, no matter what others may say about you or about them.

To those from whom you suffer either these or any other trials, do not show signs of anger, or of hatred, or of revenge; and especially do not let any of these passions be made manifest by your actions or by your words. On the contrary, as Our Lord teaches, love those who maltreat you; be kind to them and never let pass an opportunity of doing them a service. Both these acts of charity are urged on his children by St. Benedict: "If any things that are hard, contrary, and injurious are done to you, with a quiet conscience patiently embrace them, and, in suffering them, grow not weary, give not over, since the Scripture saith: 'He only that persevereth to the end shall be saved.'

\* Lib. ii., cap. 2, q. 136, a. 4 ad. 2.

Again: 'Let thy heart be comforted and expect the Lord.' To show that the faithful man ought to bear all things for Our Lord, be they ever so contrary, it saith, in the persons of the sufferers: 'For Thee we suffer death all the day long; we are esteemed as sheep for the slaughter.' Being assured by hope of a reward from God's hands, they go on rejoicing and saying: 'But in all things we overcome by the help of Him Who hath loved us.' Moreover, in order, by patience in adversities and in injuries, to follow the precepts of the Lord, 'When struck on one cheek,' He bids us 'offer the other.' To him who taketh away our coat, He tells us to leave our cloak also; and, being constrained to carry a burthen one mile, to go twain. With St. Paul the Apostle, to suffer false brethren and persecutions; to bless those who revile and speak ill of us."\* Therefore, strive by your deeds to fulfil the precept which in these words our holy Father has given to you.

Never flee away, never turn aside from those things which cause you displeasure; but, with a heart braced up to endure, accept them from the hand of God, saying with holy Job: "If we have received good things at the hand of God, why should we not receive evil?"†—especially since these very adversities, if regarded in the light of faith, are themselves great benefits of God, bestowed by Him only on His intimate and faithful friends. With good reason, therefore, does Father Alvarez call them "a golden hail falling from heaven." Though they may destroy some few clusters in the vineyard of your life, yet the gold of which they are made is far more precious than are the clusters which by them are destroyed. Therefore, bear with patience whatever may happen to you through the loving dispensation of Divine Providence, and compel your reluctant will to submit, that your soul may not be deprived of so great a good. There passes not over your head a day that does not bring with it many small trials. Now, if with constancy you bear these trials, and if you do not wish to take the smart out of them, you will, in a short space of time, lay up for yourself

\* *Reg.*, cap. vii., grad. 4.

† *Chap.* ii. 10.



great spiritual treasures. You will dispose and inure your soul to bear many more and far heavier crosses.

If either any real or any fancied injury is inflicted on you, or on others, carefully abstain from either saying or doing anything that would savour of resentment or of revenge; accept, as a part of the heritage of Jesus Christ, any pain that the injury may cause you and leave all the rest to God. In order to help you to act thus, do not associate with those persons who, in similar circumstances, under various pretexts, always resent the ill-treatment which they have received, especially if they consider that this is inflicted by Superiors. Go not within the circle of their influence, even though for keeping beyond it you are considered to be cowardly, a person of little worth, and, in consequence, are subjected to the contradictions, the reproaches, and the scorn of those who cannot win you over to be of their way of thinking.

### SECTION III.

#### *Of Modesty, and of the Manner in which the Body should be treated.*

It is only natural to expect that aspirants to the Religious State will prepare themselves for that angelic life by great modesty of person, and by such a treatment of their bodies as will materially aid them afterwards to fulfil the duties which that State entails. For, if those who minister unto kings are scrupulously careful that neither in their dress nor in their persons there shall be anything that might offend the eyes of their masters, with much more reason the servants of the King of heaven ought to strive to be Angels in their manner of life. We will, therefore, give you some few rules, the observance of which will serve to engender in you that decorous behaviour which ought to mark every movement of a Christian youth and remove from your conduct whatever may savour of worldliness or of affectation.

In your intercourse with others, avoid laying your hands

on them ; do not pull them about ; and do not act with them in a rough, unbecoming manner. Keep your head easily erect and do not bend it to the right or to the left. Do not keep turning it about in a light, giddy sort of way, but whenever you have occasion to turn it, do so with gravity and with dignity. Suffer not your eyes to have unrestrained freedom to look on every object ; let them not travel from one thing to another ; do not satisfy their curiosity and sternly withhold them from looking on that which it is not lawful for you to see. When you are seated, do not seek the easiest and most luxurious postures, but deny yourself somewhat, even in such matters as these, by not crossing your limbs, and by thus inflicting on yourself a slight mortification. Take care never to let any passion that is disturbing your mind cast a reflection of itself, as in a mirror, on your face, so that anger, impatience, ill-temper, or any other cause of unrest, may never be seen there. Study rather to make the calm serenity of a mind at ease, and the cheerfulness engendered by a good conscience, shine forth in your countenance. Carefully avoid everything that in your person or in your dress, may be offensive to good manners.

Let your gait be neither too quick nor too slow, but aim at a medium pace which, without being hurried, is yet speedy. Therefore, never walk a running pace, unless some good reason requires it. In walking, do not sway about from side to side, or snap your fingers, or make any noise with your hands. Avoid all affectation in your gait and everything that savours of aping the manners of the great.

In conversing with others, do not stand either too close to them, or at an inconvenient distance. While any one is speaking, never interrupt him. In listening to that which is said, do not give ear with open mouth and staring eyes. If you are forced to cough while conversing with any one, be careful to turn away your face from him, or to cover your mouth with your hand. Do not yawn when in company, and if you do, let it be done without noise and always with your hand covering your mouth. You must endeavour to blow

your nose with as little resonance as possible. Avoid staring at others with a fixed and stony gaze. It is unbecoming, and for some persons dangerous, to give their eyes this indecorous liberty. If you must look into the faces of others, let it be done with all modesty. When you laugh, let it not be in a loud and boisterous manner ; “for, the fool *exalteth* his voice in laughter.” Towards all with whom you live, be respectful, gentle, kind-hearted, sympathetic and carefully on your guard against ever saying a bitter word concerning them. Do nothing to them that is either disagreeable or injurious. Should you by any chance give them offence, be not ashamed, with all frankness, humbly to ask their pardon.

In your dress let there be nothing that is jaunty, or uncommon, or unbecoming. Not only in the presence of others, but when you are alone, let modesty veil you as with a garment of honour. Shun all vanity in dress and have the good taste to do without superfluous ornaments. Be ashamed to be of the number of those who frequently consult the mirror, to see what report it will give of their personal appearance.

When you are in church, let singular reverence for the holy place be observable in every movement of your body. Your downcast eyes and clasped hands should bear witness to the internal piety which thus casts its reflection on your outward bearing. If it is your privilege to minister at the Altar, take care not to look about. Avoid talking in the holy place and repress all laughter. Be not weak enough, through human respect, to be guilty of these faults. Instead of being offended with you for not joining in this unbecoming levity, sensible persons will be much edified by your behaviour and taught to correct that which, in this matter, may be amiss in their own conduct. While you are praying, do not manifest any extraordinary signs of devotion. Do not sigh aloud. Do not pray so as to be heard by your neighbours, or with a hissing noise. All such eccentricities are occasions of disturbance to others.

Repress a too great eagerness to go to meals ; and, when



seated at table, be not the first to begin to eat, but wait till those who are older have begun their meal. Carefully avoid picking out the best of everything for yourself, and make it a rule to take that which first presents itself. Do not sit with your arms or with your elbows on the table. It is a grave breach of good breeding to eat quickly, or to fill the mouth to repletion with any kind of food. So guard the movements of your body as not to spill anything, or to soil the tablecloth. Never do anything while at table to cause anyone that is in your company either uneasiness or disgust. Be careful, therefore, neither to eat nor to drink in an audible manner. In speaking to others, while at table, do so only when your mouth is empty.

Try to observe the following counsels for guarding against faults of the tongue :

Never interrupt any one that is speaking. If you are discussing any question, never contradict him who is maintaining the opposite opinion to that which you are defending. Do not deride or address to any one biting words of sarcasm. In speaking, let not your tone of voice be loud ; do not talk continuously ; do not make use of ridicule, or of scurrility, or of expressions that are imperious, or proud, or uncharitable. Avoid boastful language and everything that would depreciate another's worth. Shun all affectation in your words, and banish from your conversation everything that, either directly or indirectly, either implicitly or explicitly, detracts from your neighbour's good fame. Most studiously guard yourself against every species of lying ; for, it is impossible for a liar ever to make any solid progress in virtue.

To the preceding precepts, most of which are intended to secure a polished exterior, we will now add a few others which will give you some idea of the way in which you ought to treat your body, so as to keep its various senses in conformity with right reason. For, if it be indulged in its natural propensities, it will bring on the soul very grave losses. He Who cannot deceive us, and Who cannot be by us deceived, has said : " He that nourisheth his servant delicately from his childhood, afterwards shall find him

stubborn.”\* In this passage, the word “servant” is generally taken by Interpreters to mean the body. Therefore, not without good reason may we say that many men, who while living in the world were over indulgent to their bodies, have afterwards, in Religious Life, experienced the truth of this sentence. They have found their servant the body, stubborn, badly trained, and refractory. Therefore, to enable you, in good time, to look to your own interest and to show you how to tame your flesh before it has had leisure to grow intractable, we will lay before you a few rules, drawn from the counsels of the Venerable Thomas of Jesus.

In your treatment of your body, you must be guided, not by its unruly appetite, but by that which its necessities require. These necessities must be measured by that which is befitting the particular state of each. It is owing to the non-observance of these principles that so many evils and sins are to be seen in the conduct of those who are living in the world. They suffer the body’s appetites, and not its legitimate necessities, to be their guides. Therefore, each person ought to lay open to a Director his condition of life, and then suffer himself to be guided by that impartial judge in the use of what is deemed suitable to the circumstances in which Providence has placed him.

You must be careful not to allow yourself any indulgence in those things towards which your natural inclination feels itself particularly drawn. Hence, you must observe and narrowly watch these propensities; for, it is from them that all the excesses of which men are guilty usually take their rise.

Give special heed to your own spiritual advancement, and, in this respect, be always inclined to believe that you do far less than you might. For, that man most egregiously deceives himself who fancies that he does far more than he ought. Hence, in your use of those things which you deem to be necessities, lean to the side of parsimony rather than to that of lavish expenditure.

\* *Prov.* xxix. 21.

Choose by preference that kind of austerity which is best adapted for the correction of those faults into which you most frequently fall, and to which you feel yourself most forcibly drawn by your natural inclinations. Thus, to correct sins of the tongue, silence is better than fasting ; to repress luxury, custody of the bodily senses is more effective than silence. Those persons who act on a different principle do not make any progress, even though they may subject themselves to the greatest hardships. All the various kinds of penitential exercises that consist in fasting, watching, hair-shirts, disciplines, lying on hard beds, and wearing rough clothing, are very salutary if they are undertaken in obedience to the precept of the Church, or are imposed by your state of life, or are made use of with the advice of a prudent Director ; but they are singularly prejudicial if they interfere with your necessary duties ; nay, they are positively evil if they are taken up to gratify your self-will. The more thoroughly they subject the flesh to the spirit, the better they are, provided only that *necessary* mortifications, such as the avoiding of grave sin, are joined with them.

Most safe in practice and most necessary in application, is that kind of austerity which puts the curb of mortification on our senses ; which guards the eyes from looking at evil, closes the ears and hinders them from listening to it, bridles the tongue, keeps the body from the luxury of idleness, the soul from the tempest of wrath, the whole man from the occasions of sin ; which crushes self-will, holds back the judgment, and lowers that esteem and that lofty opinion which we have of our own worth. You may practise this kind of mortification without any danger and without any fear of falling into excesses which usually are hard to correct. It is from this kind, however, that the natural man shrinks with far more aversion than from external rigours which touch only the flesh. These latter he feels but for the moment in which they are applied ; but the former constitute a sort of permanent sting, which is very galling to our unregenerate hearts.

But best is that austerity which consists in perpetual



recollection of soul and in constant prayer. By the Saints and by those who are experienced in such matters, this conclusion is held as certain. A proof of its truth may be seen in this one simple fact that, as a rule, men prefer to undergo any amount of external labour rather than spend a little time in prayer. The reason of this preference is not far to seek. It is that in prayer our liberty of thought is restricted. From this restriction the natural man turns away with undisguised aversion, because by it his disorderly appetites are held in check, his will is kept within due bounds, and it cannot go forth to that which it desires, it is bowed down under a yoke, it is not suffered to give free ingress to thoughts which disturb the quiet of the heart. In one word, by prayer the whole man is held captive. His desires are not gratified, his body is not flattered, his discomfort is not relieved, and nothing is permitted which heretofore he was at perfect liberty to do. Now, although custom may so inure him to all these inconveniences that, in spite of them, he will at last lead a life of quiet cheerfulness, full of consolation and of sweetness, owing to the complete subjection to the spirit to which they have reduced the rebellious flesh, yet that flesh is thereby so weakened, so worn out, so well-nigh destroyed, that it will need some little care. This care, however, must be bestowed on it in weight and in measure, with a view only to enable it to go on living this continual death, and to prevent it from being a positive hindrance to the spirit. It is much to be desired that those who wish to practise mortification would take up this kind of austerity. If they do, they will gain more solid profit from it than they could ever hope to obtain from a multiplicity of other exercises. They who, on account of their weakness, or on account of the duties of their state of life, can never hope to practise great austerity, will be able by means of this, in all security to win that to which they would otherwise never be able to attain. The reason is because with them the virtue of penance is in its right place. Now, although that which has already been said is amply sufficient to give you a correct idea of the way in

which you ought to govern your body, yet we cannot refrain from urgently recommending to you a love of sobriety and of holy abstinence. These are characteristic virtues of every Saint, virtues without which we read that no one has ever yet arrived at a notable degree of perfection and of sanctity. St. Benedict earnestly commends the practice of them to his children. Among the "Instruments" of good works we find that he introduces the following precepts: "Do not seek after delights; do not love feasting; be not given to drinking wine; be not a great eater."\* In the thirty-ninth chapter of the Rule he exhorts his Monks "to avoid excess and surfeiting, that they be not overtaken by gluttony; because there is no sin more contrary to the Christian profession." Hence that saying of Our Lord: "Take heed to yourselves, lest perchance your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness." In the fortieth chapter, he says: "Let us agree, at least not to drink to satiety, but sparingly; because wine maketh even the wise to fall away."

With respect to fasting, we do not urge you to undertake any very burthensome practice of this kind, but we earnestly recommend to your notice the following excellent precepts.

Strive to curb and hold in check the excesses of your appetite, since the faults which are committed in this respect are not so much in the food that we take as in the appetite with which we take it.

Neither eat nor drink for the mere pleasure which you receive from your food. Always have some higher motive in your mind, lest you become like the animals which seek only pleasure from their food.

In order to hinder your body from wholly giving itself up to its food, "be not," as Ecclesiasticus advises, "greedy in your feasting, and pour not out yourself upon any meat."†

Let the quantity of food which you take be regulated by the necessity which you feel for it; by the strength which you have to keep up; by your natural constitution and by the bodily occupations in which you are engaged.

\* *Reg.*, cap. iv., instr. 12, 13, 35, 36.

† *Ecclus.* xxxvii. 32.

Anything that goes beyond these limits is faulty. It ought to be corrected.

Do not desire, and still less seek for luxurious feasting, for costly viands, and for exquisitely prepared dishes.

Be not eager to use with your food those condiments which contribute to it nothing more than a stimulant to whet the appetite.

As a rule, do not partake of rare and generous wines, which may prove dangerous to the purity of your soul and your body.

When you are in good health, do not, unless compelled by necessity, either eat or drink out of meal-time.

While you are taking your meals, endeavour to sanctify this ordinary and necessary action with pious thoughts and with loving affections of soul. Call to mind, for example, the vinegar and the gall which were given to your Saviour as He hung on the Cross; the hunger and the thirst of the souls in Purgatory; the exceeding great goodness of God Who so lovingly makes provision for all your necessities.

Also, accustom yourself to perform, for the love of God, a few little acts of self-denial, by not helping yourself to some delicacy, by abstaining from the ordinary condiments, and by refraining, for a short time, from eating, or from drinking, when you feel particularly urged to do both the one and the other.

If you be careful to attend to these few hints which we have thrown out with respect to mortification, you will go to the Monastery well prepared to begin Religious Life, in which one of the first lessons to be learnt is how to curb the appetite; for, no solid progress can be made in virtue till, by practical experience, this lesson has been learnt.

If you are of the number of those who have not acquired even the rudiments of these preliminary lessons in self-denial, but who have been over-delicate in the treatment of their bodies and afraid of even the name "mortification," we address to you these words of the Apostle St. Paul: "I beseech you, brethren, by the mercy of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing unto God, your reasonable



service.”\* Do not turn a deaf ear to so earnest an exhortation! Be not one of those who are slaves to their bellies, to money, to honour, to pleasure—for the sake of which things they willingly undergo much discomfort. For God, however, Who gave them all that they have, they will suffer nothing. Do not you be so ungrateful, but resolve to pay unto your Lord the worship which is His due, no matter what pains that resolution may cost you. You are ready enough to put yourself to grave inconvenience, in order not to give offence to any one for whom you have a great esteem. To God, however, Who merits all the love of your heart, will you be less condescending than you are to a mortal man? Immolate to His honour both yourself and your own convenience, and that immolation will be unto Him an oblation of praise, concerning which the Prophet sings: “The sacrifice of praise shall glorify me.”† Offer to your supreme Lord the sacrifice of justice, by keeping a strict guard over all your senses, but particularly over your eyes. Mortify your sense of taste, your sense of feeling, and set a guard over all those other avenues through which your disorderly passions seek for gratification. Withhold them from the enjoyment not only of unlawful pleasures, but of those that are lawful. Never indulge in any pleasure for the mere purpose of the enjoyment which you may derive from it, but with the intention of pleasing God Who will accept this as a most precious sacrifice, for which He will bountifully reward you both in this world and in the world to come.

\* *Rom. xii. 1.*

† *Ps. xlix. 23.*

## CHAPTER X

### OF PERSEVERANCE IN YOUR VOCATION, AND OF THE WAY IN WHICH YOU OUGHT PROXIMATELY TO PREPARE YOURSELF TO ENTER RELIGIOUS LIFE

THE obstacles thrown by their fellow-men, by the devil, and by their own perverse nature, in the way of those who wish to enter Religious Life, are neither few in number nor insignificant in character. It is, therefore, necessary for you not to lose courage when you meet with them, but, with a determined will and a heart full of confidence in God, to remove them as best you may. To inspire you with the determination manfully to face and perseveringly to labour at their removal, we will bring before your notice some few examples of youths who have given special proofs of constancy in their vocation, that, fired by a noble desire to emulate their courageous perseverance, you may fearlessly encounter the difficulties which stand in your way, may prove successful in overcoming them, and may thus prepare yourself for the reception of those divine favours with which Our good God is wont to reward those who are generous in His regard.

In his resolve to embrace Religious Life, St. Gall could not be shaken by the tears of his father, by the caresses of his mother, by the sorrow of their retainers, or by the bright prospect which his noble birth opened out before him. Setting aside all these and giving himself up to the love and the service of God, he humbly submitted himself to the yoke of monastic life.

When St. Columbanus was preparing to quit his fatherland, in order to devote himself in solitude to the service of

God, his mother, with tears of sorrow, besought him not to abandon her. "Have you not heard," said he to her, "these words of Our Lord: 'He that loveth either father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me?'" As she clung to the door and endeavoured to hinder his departure, he implored her to let him go. But she would not, and, with loud cries and lamentations, she at last laid herself down across the threshold, protesting that she would never give him her consent. Stepping over her prostrate form, he left his ancestral abode, beseeching her not to give way to grief and telling her that she should never again see his face, for, he was going whithersoever the Lord should point out to him a way.

It is related in the *Life of St. Wallaric*, Abbot of Leuçon, that although his father, with most earnest entreaties, urged him to quit the Monastery and return to a worldly life, yet he could not prevail on his son to do so. To all his reasonings and prayers, Wallaric gave no other answer than: "I will never return to my earthly home."

After the noble and illustrious Virgin Rusticola had embraced cloistral life, her mother sent to the convent in which her child was living some of her servants, bearing a large amount of money, jewellery of priceless value and splendid raiment, that by these earthly goods they might tempt her daughter to leave her retirement and return with them to her home. But all to no purpose. Rusticola's determination was built on the firm foundations of those truths which faith reveals to us. She spurned these worldly baits as she would have spurned the mire of the streets, and remained all her life fixed in her firm resolve.

After St. Guido had made up his mind to devote himself to Monastic Life, his father, not knowing anything of his son's intention, urged him to enter the married state. In answer to his father's repeated exhortations and arguments, Guido at last said: "There are two maidens who have won my affections, and I wish to have your advice as to which of them I ought to choose for my bride. The one is most nobly born, rich in vast possessions, powerful in the wide



range of her influence and dowered with a beauty of form entrancing to behold." By this maiden he meant the Monastic Life, towards which all the affections of his soul were attracted by a sort of charm which it seemed impossible for him to resist. "With respect to the other maiden, although I love her almost to distraction"—meaning by this one the world, with its bewitching pleasures—"yet she is in every way inferior to the first. Now, I ask you to advise me what it were best that I should do. Which of these two shall I take to be my wedded wife?" His father, without the slightest hesitation, said: "By all means choose the first and do everything in your power to make her your own." Taking him at his word, Guido at once entered the Clerical State, then made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and being warned from heaven to enter the Order of St. Benedict, embraced the Monastic Life and spent the rest of his days in the practice of every virtue.

—Omitting many other similar examples of constancy in the pursuit of that vocation which God vouchsafes to chosen souls, we will relate the wonders which, in this respect, are recorded of the great St. Bernard. From the recital of them, you will learn not only to be faithful to the call that has been given to you, but to draw others to tread in your footsteps. Both by word and by deed you will animate them with courage to take on their shoulders the sweet yoke of Christ; and those among them who are wavering in their resolution, your good counsel will strengthen to enter with confidence the Religious State.

When St. Bernard began to know the world, and to reflect that the life of one who lives amid its ceaseless distractions and its engrossing pleasures is similar to that which a man leads who is living over the den of a venomous serpent, he began seriously to entertain the thought of fleeing from a position of so great peril. He saw that the world offered him great wealth, vast possessions, and held out before him hopes of even greater means of self-gratification. But his keen eye took in at a glance the real worth of these things, and his heart pronounced them to be hollow and valueless.

In the silence of his own bosom a voice made itself heard and said to him: "Come to Me, all ye who labour and who are heavily burthened, and I will refresh you. Take up My yoke upon you, and you shall find rest for your souls." Preparing to obey the call thus given to him, he began to look about him, and to take counsel with himself as to the best place in which he could most easily find for his soul that rest after which his heart so earnestly yearned. At once there occurred to his mind that recent foundation which was afterwards known as "the Cistercian Order." Up to that date few had been the number of those who had knocked at its gates for admission; for, the austerity of its Rule and the poverty of its members frightened away all except souls of heroic mould. But, as the heart of him who truly seeks God is dismayed by no sacrifice that is required of it, neither the poverty nor the austerity of the new foundation had any terrors for Bernard. He fixed his eye steadfastly on it and saw that in it he might be securely hidden from the gaze of the world, safe from the troubling of men, protected from the pride of noble birth, from the vanity of intellectual superiority, and from the repute of great sanctity.

As soon as his brothers and his other relatives perceived that his thoughts were turned towards Religious Life, they left nothing undone to direct the current of those thoughts into quite another channel, by endeavouring to persuade him to apply the faculties of his mind to the pursuit of science and of letters. The glowing picture of worldly fame which they painted before his imagination, for a time arrested his attention, and, as he afterwards confessed, almost prevailed on him to turn away from the career to which God was calling him. But the memory of his holy mother was opportunely flashed into his mind. That memory made him pause before taking what might have been for him a fatal step. It seemed to him that she oftentimes met him and with tears and words of reproach, rebuked him for thinking of these trifles, whereas she had with infinite care educated him to aspire to higher and

nobler things. At last, while on his way to visit his brothers who were serving under the Duke of Burgundy at the siege of the Castle of Grancey, these thoughts began to raise in his mind a cloud of troubles which beyond measure saddened and perplexed him. As he rode along, weighed down with the thoughts which oppressed him, he came to a little wayside chapel. Halting for a few moments, he dismounted and entered the sacred edifice. Casting himself on his knees, he bent his head, and his pent-up feelings found vent in a flood of tears. Stretching forth his hands and lifting up his voice, he poured forth his soul in prayer to God. This was the turning-point in his career. He rose from his knees and went forth from the Sanctuary, with the resolve of his heart fixed for ever. He would, with God's help, be naught else than a Religious.

It was not to a deaf ear that the voice which spoke within him said: "Let him who heareth say, Come"; for, from that moment the fire which God had kindled in his bosom, in order that therewith Bernard might inflame all his brothers, flashed from side to side, as the devouring element does when some vast forest is all ablaze, igniting first that which is near and then that which is afar off. With the exception of his youngest brother who was not yet old enough to embrace the Monastic State, but who was left behind to console their aged father, the flame of divine love laid hold of and carried off to Religious Life all the rest.

In the next place, it clasped in its purifying embrace his relatives; then his companions; then those of his friends in whose souls there lay smouldering the embers of a thorough conversion to God. Bernard's uncle, Gauldry, was the first to follow the example of his illustrious nephew. He was a man high in the esteem of the world, possessing great influence among the men of his time, a soldier of no mean skill and courage, and lord of the Castle of Trouillon. Immediately after him, Bartholomew, who was younger than the rest of the brothers who followed Bernard, came into his views and yielded to the salutary warnings which bade him seek the things that are above and



not those that are on the earth. Then Andrew, who also was younger than Bernard, and who had but recently begun his military career, was with some difficulty won over to share in this holy undertaking. For, at first he was deaf to all argument, until, suddenly exclaiming: "I see my mother," he also joined the devoted little band and became a soldier of Christ at the very moment in which he ceased to be a soldier of the world. His holy mother at that time appeared to him and with a calm and joyous countenance, congratulated her son on account of the heroic purpose which he had in his mind. He was not the only one of the brothers that witnessed this wondrous apparition. Bernard tells us that he also was favoured with a similar vision.

Guido, the eldest of this saintly family, was at this time a married man. He had struck his roots deeply into the soil of the world. Bernard's proposal to embrace the Monastic Life was at first received by him with some hesitation; but, when he came to think the matter over and to weigh all the reasons that urged him to throw in his lot with those who were now turning their backs on all that earth could promise them, he resolved to follow in their footsteps if his wife could be prevailed on to give her consent. This consent it seemed utterly impossible to obtain; for, she was young, nobly born, and a mother. But Bernard saw no great difficulty in the matter. He told his brother without any hesitation that either this lady would of her own accord give her consent, or, if she refused to acquiesce in the design of heaven, God Himself would remove her from this world. The purpose which her husband had in view was gently broken to her. At the very mention of it, she at once expressed her determination never to yield up her rights as a wife and mother. Thereupon her husband, in that spirit of child-like faith for which he was afterwards so renowned, resolved to cast away all that he possessed in the world, to lead the life of a labourer and to live by the sweat of his brow. But the hand of God was not long in finding out her who would not suffer one whom the Lord was calling, to rid himself of the trammelling cares of the world. A grievous

malady attacked her, and, by scourging her body, purified her heart and softened it to receive the impress of divine grace. She saw that it was hard for her to kick against the goad, and sending for Bernard, humbly asked his pardon, at the same time begging that she also might be permitted to embrace the Religious Life. Her wishes were gladly acceded to; she made a vow of chastity, and, entering a Convent of Religious women, passed the rest of her days in the exercises of a perfect life.

The next in age to Guido was Gerard. He also was a soldier, wary and far-seeing, most amiable in disposition, and by all with whom he came in contact very tenderly beloved. With that worldly wisdom of which men think so highly, he attributed the facility with which the others had readily acquiesced in Bernard's plan, to a certain fickleness and frivolity of mind which we are not surprised to find in certain characters. To all his saintly brother's earnest exhortations and counsels he opposed an obstinate resistance, till at last Bernard, illuminated with the light of faith and wondrously fired with the zeal of fraternal charity, said to him: "Naught but pain will give you understanding." Then, with his finger touching Gerard's side, he said: "The day will come, and it will come very soon, when a lance piercing through this place, will open for the salutary advice which you now despise, a way into your heart. You will be filled with fear, but you will not die." Thus he spoke, and the sequel fully verified his every word. For, after a few days, Gerard, while engaging the enemy, was wounded, surrounded by the foe, and taken prisoner. Feeling the lance pierce his side, in the very place indicated by his brother and being filled with a sudden fear of death, he cried out as they were dragging him away: "I am a Monk! I am a Monk of Citeaux." Notwithstanding this protestation he was hurried off and shut up in a house, a close prisoner. A messenger soon carried the tidings of this mishap to Bernard who, on receiving the news, said: "I knew and predicted that this would come to pass. It is hard for him to kick against the goad. His wound, however, is not unto death. It is unto

life." The event proved the truth of these words; for, Gerard speedily recovered from the hurt which he had received and persevered in his intention of carrying into effect the vow which he had made. But though freed by this providential accident from the bonds which bound him to the world, he was not immediately released from the material chains which kept him a prisoner. These chains were the only impediments that now hindered him from at once obeying the call of God to take upon himself the yoke of Religious Life. Divine Providence, however, in this respect also, again came to his assistance and struck them from his limbs. Bernard hastened to visit his brother and tried, by every means at his disposal, to procure his instant liberation. But all to no purpose. He was not allowed even to speak with him. In these circumstances, he did all that he could to confirm him in his good purpose. Drawing nigh to the house in which Gerard was confined, Bernard raised his voice and cried out, in tones loud enough to reach his brother's ear: "Know that we are soon to enter on our Monastic Life. As you are not suffered to go with us, strive to be a Monk in the place in which you are; for, that which we wish to do, and which we cannot carry into effect, is accounted by God as already done."

Gerard, wounded and a prisoner, began to be weighed down with anxiety. But God did not forget His afflicted servant; for, after a few days, while he was sleeping on his uneasy couch, it seemed to him that he heard a voice within him saying: "This day, Gerard, you will be set at liberty." It was then the holy season of Lent, and as he sat, towards evening, wrapt in thought about what he had heard during his sleep, he touched with his hand the chain with which he was bound. To his great astonishment, it snapped in two, so that he was able to move about. But he was not yet a free man. The door of his place of confinement was fast shut; and before the gates of the house, a great number of beggars had collected. How should he be able to leave this cell, and, having effected that, how escape unobserved through the men who stood without? While



reflecting thus with himself, he arose and went towards the door, not so much in the hope of escaping, as of satisfying his curiosity. Stretching forth his hand to examine the fastenings, he touched the lock, when, to his great surprise, it came away in his hand and the door stood open for his egress. Passing onward through the front entrance and walking with difficulty because of his fetters, he made for the neighbouring church in which the Vesper-office was going on. The crowd of poor people standing before the door of the house whence he issued, seeing what was done, and being filled with fear, fled away without uttering a single cry.

As Gerard drew near the church, one of the members of the house in which he had been imprisoned—a relative of its master—came out through the great doorway, and seeing him hastening towards the sacred edifice, said: "You are too late, Gerard." These words startled him; but the man presently added: "If you make haste, you will still hear some of the service." Saying these words, he helped Gerard up the steps leading to the church, not knowing what had happened; for, it seems that his eyes were miraculously hindered from taking in the situation. It was only when Gerard was actually entering the church doors, and when he could no longer be held back, that the man became conscious of what had really happened, and that the prisoner had escaped.

It was thus that God freed His servant, at one and the same time from bodily captivity and from the bondage in which the world had held him enthralled. From this incident of Gerard's conversion, we may see how dear to God was Bernard at this, the beginning of his conversion; for Our Lord made known to him that which was to be, as clearly as if it had already occurred. For, when with his finger he touched his brother's side, the lance seemed to him to be there, as really as it afterwards was when one of the enemy thrust it in during the heat of the furious conflict.

But to return to Bernard. Those who were animated with his spirit gathered round him and went with him to pray in the church. As they entered the door, the priest

was reading from the Epistles of St. Paul that lesson in which the Apostle says: "God is faithful; for, He Who hath begun a good work in you will perfect the same unto the day of Jesus Christ." Hearing these appropriate words, the saintly youth received them as if they had been spoken to him from heaven. He exulted and rejoiced; for, he felt that the hand of God was with him. From that auspicious day he began to preach and to gather to his standard as many chosen souls as he was able to win over to share in his enterprise. He put on the new man, and those who heretofore were accustomed to hear from his lips naught but brilliant conversations about literary matters and the ordinary gossip of worldly society, were now surprised to hear him speaking of the most serious questions and of the necessity for a thorough change of life. He showed them that the joys of earth are fleeting; that life itself is full of many miseries; that death is striding on with rapid pace; that the life to come, both for the good and for the wicked, is to last for ever. Of those who heard him, as many as were pre-ordained by God to be sharers in this great design, moved by the power of divine grace, by the fascination of his eloquent words, by his prayers and by his earnestness, yielded themselves up willing captives to his master-mind, and followed him in his pursuit of religious perfection. Among these was Hugo, Count of Maçon, a man renowned for his noble birth, his unsullied probity, and his great wealth. In after life he was taken from the Monastery of Pontigny which he had built, and on account of his sanctity was made Bishop of the Church of Auxerre. As soon as he heard of the conversion of Bernard, his bosom friend and most cherished companion, he lamented over him as if Bernard had actually died, so utterly did he consider his friend to be cut off from the world. Very different, however, were his sentiments after he had for some time conversed with Bernard, on a certain occasion when chance had brought them together. As the saintly youth spoke, the Spirit of truth shot the bright rays of His light into Hugo's heart, and quite changed his sentiments and his

views. He gave his hand in fellowship to Bernard, and the friends were once again more closely united in the bonds of true brotherly affection than they had ever been before ; for, Hugo resolved to tread in Bernard's footsteps and to renounce the world. They parted ; but after a few days our Saint learned with sorrow that the arguments and the reproaches of Hugo's friends had turned him aside from his holy purpose. Taking advantage of a Bishops' meeting, which was to be held in the province in which the Count resided, Bernard hastened to recall him to a sense of the risk which he ran in thus looking back, after having put his hand to the plough. Hugo's false friends at once guessed the purpose for which Bernard had come, and cleverly cut off from him all means of approaching the deserter, or of even communicating with him. But although thus shut off from speaking to Hugo himself, he was not debarred from speaking to Hugo's God ; and therefore, from the depth of his soul he cried to the Lord for the salvation of his perishing friend. Our merciful Saviour was not deaf to the prayer which came up before Him ; for, He sent down on the assemblage which had gathered in the open fields, a sudden and violent deluge of rain which caused nearly all to seek shelter in the neighbouring village. This was an opportunity favourable to Bernard's purpose ; seeing Hugo, he caught him by the arm, and said to him : " You shall brave this downpour with me." Hugo did not resist. They were left alone together, and yet not quite alone ; for, with them was God Who instantaneously restored serenity to the heavens above their heads and to the perturbation which troubled Hugo's heart. Without any reluctance, he once again made his promise and never more violated his plighted word.

Sinners, indeed, seeing this victory, were wroth ; they gnashed with their teeth and pined away in sorrow ; but Bernard, trusting in the Lord, gained a glorious triumph over the world. He now began, both in private and in public, to preach his crusade in favour of the Religious Life, and to preach it with a force so great and an eloquence so persuasive that,



wherever he appeared, mothers hid their sons ; wives would not let their husbands listen to him ; friends dragged away their friends from his presence, because the Holy Spirit had given to him words of so great power that men were unable to resist the magic of their influence. As the number of those who came within reach of this invisible force increased and as they were drawn into fellowship with Bernard, men were able to say of them that which the Evangelist said of the first believers: "The multitude of them had but one heart and one soul. They dwelt together in unity, nor did any one of the others dare to join himself to them." At Chatillon they had a house which was common to all. In this they assembled, and dwelt, and held conferences. Any one that was not of their society did not dare to enter ; and those who ventured to do so were overcome by that which they saw and by that which they heard. They adored the Lord and proclaimed aloud that God was among them, and then either joined their company or departed from among them, weeping, indeed, over themselves, and pronouncing them truly happy and blessed. For, never before was such a thing known in those parts as that the conversion of any one should be foretold. Bernard and his company lived together in the secular habit for about six months after they had determined to embrace the Religious Life. This they did to give time for their number to increase, and for some among them to settle their worldly affairs, before bidding an eternal farewell to all that had hitherto bound them to earth.

As day followed day, they began to wonder whether Satan would succeed in luring away from the narrow path any one of their number ; and God was pleased, by a kind of revelation, to make known to them that which was about to happen. For, during the night one of them had a vision, in which it seemed to him that they were all gathered together in one place, eating some food of marvellous brightness and of most delicious taste. He remarked, however, that while the rest with the utmost delight were feasting on it, two of their company were left without any

share in the banquet. For, one of them did not take any portion of it, and, though the other raised the food to his mouth, yet, instead of eating it, he scattered it all about him. The sequel explained the meaning of this extraordinary vision. For, one gave up the undertaking and went back to the world before the day came for taking the decisive step, and the other, though he made the first step with the rest, yet he did not continue to walk in the ways of justice. In after years, some of the Brethren met him wandering about, like another Cain, a fugitive from the face of the Lord. As far as could be guessed from his appearance, he seemed to be leading a low and miserable kind of existence and to be without any particle of manly courage. Towards the end of his life he came to Clairvaux, forced to take this step by bodily infirmities and by cruel want; for, though born of a noble family, he was an outcast from among his kinsfolk, acquaintances, and friends. Yet he did not give up self-will, though he gave up all power to possess any property. He died at last, not inside the Monastery, as a brother, but outside, as a mendicant subsisting on charity.

The day at last came for the devoted little band to carry into execution the vow which they had made. Bernard went forth from his home, followed by his brothers. He was their spiritual father; for, by the word of life, he had begotten them unto Christ. As they were going away, Guido, the eldest, seeing his youngest brother Nivard, who was then a little boy, playing with his companions in the open square, said to him: "Well, my little Nivard, all our possessions will now belong to thee!" The child, looking up into his face, with a kind of inspiration, replied: "Heaven for thee and earth for me! That is not a fair division!" With these words in their ears, the brothers sped on their way. The boy remained at home with their aged father; but after a time, when the maturity of early youth had expanded his mind and enlarged his bodily frame, he followed his brothers into the Cloister. Father, relatives, friends were not able to detain him in the world. The voice

of God was calling, and he generously answered, and went the way in which it invited him to walk—the road to heaven.

Attentively consider the noble example given to you by these men, an example of constancy in following out the vocation vouchsafed to them by God, and do your utmost to imitate the lofty pattern of self-denial which they set before your eyes.

The advice which we have hitherto given to you is, as it were, only a remote kind of preparation for your entrance into Religious Life. The nearer you draw to the happy moment in which you are to enter the Cloister, the more earnest ought your endeavour to be to fit yourself to become a worthy servant of the Divine Majesty. Therefore, imitate the conduct of the Israelites when they were about to leave the land of their bondage. For, before immolating their victims to the Lord God, they made a journey of three days, into the wilderness. Therefore, for the same space of time, before you offer yourself in the Monastery, a victim unto God, go into solitude,—not by withdrawing yourself from the company and the conversation of men, for, that withdrawal is not practicable at this particular juncture, but by taking your mind from the cares and the affections which earthly things are wont to engender in the soul and by disposing yourself for the final and complete oblation of yourself.

During these three days, offer to the Holy Trinity all your works, words, and thoughts, that through the merits of Our Saviour, the intercession of the Blessed Virgin and of our holy Father St. Benedict, you may obtain the grace to begin with great fervour your practice of the Religious Life. In order to obtain this grace, endeavour, if it is in your power to do so, to visit four times each day the most Holy Sacrament of the Altar, and for this purpose make two visits each morning and two each afternoon.

At these visits, on the first day, pass in review all the benefits bestowed on you by your most loving God, from the first moment in which you began to be until this present hour, and stir up in yourself ardent affections of gratitude



for these favours. Is it not, therefore, right and just that you should, with all your strength, serve, love, and obey so great a benefactor? Think, also, on the vanity and the deceit of the world, and how unworthy an act it would be on your part to abandon God in order to love and to serve it. Prove that you deem it to be so, by not giving up your heart to the joys which the world may this day offer to you for your acceptance. Moreover, as a proof of your gratitude, recite with the most devout affection of which you are capable, the hymn *Te Deum Laudamus*.

On the second day, in the bitterness of your soul, think of the ingratitude which you have shown to God, in return for the great and manifold benefits which He has bestowed on you, and from the depth of a contrite heart exclaim: "Remember not, O Lord! the sins of my youth, and my ignorances. A contrite and humbled heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise." Towards evening, prepare yourself to make, on the following day, your sacramental confession, with all those conditions of which we have already spoken in a preceding chapter. Repeat, with sentiments of deep sorrow, the Psalm *Miserere*. If necessary, strive by pious conversations with devout men, to keep alive within you this internal grief of soul.

On the third day, reflect on the benefit of your calling to the Religious State, and endeavour to elicit most ardent desires of embracing that happy condition of life. Especially do this when you draw nigh to sit as a guest at the banquet of the most Holy Eucharist. Spend the day in enkindling and in keeping alive within you the flames of these earnest desires. If any worldly pleasures are offered to you, by no means suffer your soul to be stained by them. Against their entrance, shut fast the gate of your heart, and keep those pleasures at a safe distance from the palace of your soul. The following prayers will be useful to you during these three days of preparatory recollection.

*Desire of Religious Life.*

O my Saviour, my dearest Jesus! Who for love of me didst abide on this earth for three-and-thirty years; Who didst deign to become man and to suffer in soul and in body confusion and pain for my sake, when will that happy day arrive, on which, after the example of so many of both sexes and of every rank in life, who for love of Thee, have shut themselves up within the walls of the Cloister, have retired into the desert, have dwelt in the caves and in the holes of the earth, I also shall abandon everything for Thy sake; I shall be clothed in a poor habit; I shall conceal myself in the shade of some monastic retreat?

But, O my Love! how can I abandon everything, I who have so little from which to withdraw myself? Very few are the possessions that I call my own. Yet, few as they are, I am willing to give them up and to retire into the desert of some Cloister, in imitation of Thy austere forerunner, St. John the Baptist, of whom holy Church thus sings:

“While yet a child thou dwelledst in the desert,  
Turmoil of cities leaving far away,  
Lest into paths of idle conversation  
Thy tongue should stray.”

Yet, O my dearest Jesus! though destitute of much that I might abandon, I desire entirely and completely to leave my kindred and my acquaintance; to give up the world which is the occasion of so many temporal consolations and conveniences; to cut myself off from the knowledge and the familiar friendship of men, and especially of those among them who are considered to be great; to withdraw from the reach of the world's favours, from its news, its liberty of action, and its honours; but particularly to leave myself, my inclinations, my self-will, my judgments, my sentiments, and all objects that are pleasing to me.

For my sake Thou didst will to be poor; and I on my part, desire to observe voluntary poverty; to feel the absence and the need of many little conveniences; to

endure the pain which is engendered by the privation of them; to possess nothing and to be able to give away nothing, without the permission of Superiors.

Thou Thyself wast of a Virgin born, and, therefore, Thou didst love more than the rest the virginal St. John, who was chosen by Thee to be an Apostle while he was still a virgin, and who ever afterwards continued to be a virgin. Thou didst commit Thy Virgin Mother to his care, and him to the care of thy Virgin Mother, because the special glory of his chastity had made him worthy of Thy special love. I also am soon to vow to Thee perpetual chastity; therefore, with the aid of Thy grace, I will try to be exceedingly modest; I will endeavour to preserve a perfect moral integrity and purity both of mind and of body; and, as the best means of securing this, I will constantly, with the greatest care, with the utmost zeal, watch over the senses of my body and keep my mind continually occupied with Thee, O my God!

For my sake, O ardent Lover of my soul! Thou wast obedient to the bitter and most ignominious death of the Cross! and I, for love of Thee, desire to vow obedience according to the Rule of St. Benedict. By this vow I mean to promise to Thee that obedience which, in various places and passages of his Holy Rule, is prescribed and ordered. Therefore, as a true victim of this lowly virtue, I will for love of Thee always obey every order, no matter how hard and contrary to my natural inclination it may chance to be. I will obey with joy, because this opportunity of denying my self-will is vouchsafed to me. I will obey even when obedience covers me with confusion, fills me with repugnance, lowers my reputation, and detracts from my honour.

Thou hast said in the Sacred Scripture: "It is good for a man when he hath borne the yoke from his youth."\* Oh! grant that I may enjoy this great privilege! Do Thou, O Lord! take possession of my soul and of my body, before the world, the flesh, and the devil lay hold of them. The first-fruits of my youth, the bloom of my early years, and

\* *Lament.* iii. 27.



the outcome of my reason are Thine. I pray and beseech Thee to guard them for Thyself.

From the first moment of Thy most holy Incarnation, Thou didst suffer for me! Why then, ungrateful wretch that I am, do I put off suffering for Thee? Why do I not, from my earliest youth, begin to suffer for Thee? I will presently go to that home of piety, in which, like the holy Angels, it will be my privilege to sing praise unto Thee. In the solitude of my cell I will lovingly converse with Thee only. I will listen to Thy voice speaking unto me, till my soul be melted within me. Then I shall be enabled to cover myself with well-merited confusion, by choosing to be an abject in the house of God, rather than to dwell in the tabernacle of sinners.

There, in God's house, I will not live for myself, but only in order to mortify myself and to spend myself in Thy service.

For love of me Thou didst remain fastened to the Cross. Thou didst not leave it, as Thou mightest so easily have done, until pious hands, at the appointed time, loosed Thee from Thy bed of pain. Therefore, out of love for Thee, I also desire to promise that stability, in accordance with which, I will not, without the freely accorded permission of my Superior, leave the precincts of the Monastery, or loose from my neck the yoke of the Rule. I will make my stability in the Congregation, not an idle stability, but a stability that is busy in the continual exercise of solid virtue. As our holy Father desires, I will make the Cloister a kind of spiritual workshop, in which I will ply those various implements or tools of good works, of which he gives a list in the fourth chapter of the Rule.

I desire to vow unto Thee amendment of manners, and thereby to make myself averse from the actions of the world and continually turned towards the execution of acts of greater perfection, but particularly of that perfection which St. Benedict, in the Rule inspired by Thee, endeavours to teach me.

Through love of me, O most sweet Jesus! Thou didst

subject Thyself to human laws, to the hard law of Circumcision and to the other ordinances of the Old Covenant, although these could in noway be binding upon Thee. For love of Thee, I desire and I will strive to the utmost of my power, to observe all the laws and the commands imposed on me by the Rule of Thy servant St. Benedict; by Superiors Thy Representatives, whether these are immediate Superiors or only mediate; and also by those whom they may appoint as their substitutes.

O my beloved Redeemer, and all ye holy Angels, and ye Saints of God, whose relics are preserved with pious veneration in the Monastery in which I am about to be received, be ye witnesses of these my most earnest desires. Be not only witnesses, but my most efficacious helpers, to observe with fidelity all those obligations that, in due time, I shall have to fulfil, in virtue of my vows. By nature and by a thousand other ties, I am Thine, O my God and my love! I desire also to be Thine for ever, by actual giving of myself to Thee, in my holy profession, by my state of life, by law, by the place in which I live, by the habit which I wear, and by my every act. Therefore, uphold me, O Lord! according to Thy word, and I shall live, and let me not be confounded in my expectation. Amen.

#### SYNOPSIS OF THE MATTER CONTAINED IN THE PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

In each week, choose a convenient day and hour for the purpose of retiring to some secluded spot, to meditate on that which you have learnt from this little work. In order to do this with that methodical exactitude which will ensure success, first begin by eliciting a lively act of faith in the Divine Presence; then adore the infinite Majesty, before Whom your faith tells you that you ever stand. After this, make a humble petition for light to know your defects, and for grace to amend them. In the next place, pass in review the points of meditation presently to be laid before you; and, as you reflect on these, mark either on paper or on the

tablets of your memory, your various defects which conscience may point out to you. When you see these, your manifold shortcomings, humbly ask from God pardon for having committed them. Lastly, make a firm purpose of amendment, for exciting which the following motives will be found very serviceable :

1. It is your interest to correct these defects.
2. Your soul will be filled with great consolation if you endeavour to do so.
3. You are obliged to undertake this task, not only because you are a Christian, but because God has bestowed on you the singular favour of a vocation to Religious Life.
4. At the hour of death, you will be glad to have corrected them.
5. If you have not succeeded in so doing, you will be covered with confusion when you stand before the tribunal of Jesus Christ.
6. You will be rewarded with the joys of paradise, if you win the victory over self.
7. Your ingratitude would be monstrous, if, notwithstanding the benefits conferred on you by God, and the love which He has lavished on you, you either were unwilling to amend, or were always trying to put off from day to day the necessity for so doing.
8. By correcting your faults, you will give great joy to God, and you will render to Him a most acceptable service.

Endeavour, by these various motives, to stir up the affections of your heart, to form new purposes of amendment, to devise means for carrying these purposes into effect, and humbly and fervently to beseech God for the grace which will enable you to do so.

#### POINTS FOR MEDITATION DRAWN FROM THE PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

##### 1. *Truly Seeking God.*

Examine whether your intention in choosing Religious Life is really pure and uninterested. Does your zeal for God manifest itself by turning your thoughts to Him on waking in the morning, and by referring your actions throughout the course of the day to His greater honour and glory ?



## 2. *Horror of Sin.*

Do you, on examination, find yourself in such a frame of mind that you can with confidence say that you are in the state of grace, so that, if you were presently summoned to the bar of divine justice, you would not have reason to fear eternal damnation? If you cannot, after a careful scrutiny, feel that you are in these holy dispositions, but if you are conscious that your soul is burthened with the guilt of one or of many grievous sins, then at once fall on your knees, elicit a sincere act of heartfelt sorrow, make a firm resolve at the earliest opportunity to wash away these deadly sins, and be determined never again to besmear your soul with them. Are you living in the proximate occasion of mortally offending Our good God? What zeal do you show in avoiding all dangerous conversations; in curbing the licence of the bodily senses, and particularly the sense of sight; in abstaining from the reading of bad books; in withholding yourself from the commission of deliberate venial sins; in setting your face against unseemly talk? What are your sentiments with respect to those liberties in which some persons think that they may indulge on pretence of bidding an eternal farewell to the world?

## 3. *The Three Vows.*

What care do you take to exercise yourself in acts of poverty, of chastity, and of obedience?

First, with respect to poverty. Examine whether you cleave with overgreat affection to earthly and transitory things. A test of this will be, if you be willing to have a practical experience of the privations to which poverty subjects those who are really poor. Do you waste your money, by foolishly expending it in the purchase of curiosities and of useless knick-knacks? Do you ever take care to succour the suffering members of Christ's body in the persons of the poor?

Secondly, with respect to chastity. Do you show your love of this angelic virtue, by the earnestness with which

you strive to win and to possess it? What care do you take to shun, not only the proximate, but the remote occasions which lead to the loss of it, yea, even every speck that might detract somewhat from its spotless brightness? Are you careful, on the first advent of evil thoughts to your mind, to dash them against the rock, Christ? Do you frequently lift up your heart, in fervent prayer to God, for the gift of chastity; and, for the same end, do you implore the suffrages of the most pure Virgin Mother, and of the other Saints? Are you accustomed, especially in time of temptation, to call to mind the awe-inspiring images of the great eternal truths? Do you aim at having constantly before your memory the fact that God is ever present with you; and are you daily striving to keep your heart fully occupied with Him, since this is one of the most efficacious remedies against the demon of impurity? Are you wont to be over soft and gentle in the treatment of your body? If, while in the company of others, you either see or hear anything contrary to this delicate virtue, do you strive to emulate the conduct of St. Bernardine of Siena and of St. Francis de Sales? Are you sincere and outspoken with your Spiritual Father concerning all doubts and temptations in matters of holy purity?

With respect to obedience. Do you show to your parents and to those who, in any way, have authority over you, that deferential bearing which they have a right to expect from you; and do you pay to their orders that prompt attention which Almighty God requires?

In your obedience, is that which you do, done purely and simply from some supernatural motive, and not rather because it pleases you, because it is convenient, and delightful to you? In matters that are lawful, do you ever try to deny yourself and to subdue your natural inclinations and tastes? How do you fill up your time? If each of its hours has been marked out for certain duties, are you careful never to thrust aside any duty that is somewhat disagreeable to you, in order to occupy yourself with one more suitable to your taste and to your humour?

#### 4. *Stability.*

With respect to this, and to that other vow, "amendment of manners," about which special mention is made in the Benedictine form of profession, examine in what way you are preparing for the fulfilment of them during your Religious Life. Therefore, see whether you have an affection for solitude, and, as far as is compatible with your present condition, whether you seek after it; not an idle solitude, but one that is at once fruitful and delightful, by reason of the various and useful occupations with which its hours are filled up. Are you kind, respectful, gentle, and sympathetic towards all with whom you live, carefully shunning contention and obstinacy in adhering to your own ideas? Do you earnestly apply yourself to the necessary task of uprooting any evil habits that you may have contracted; and how often, and with what intensity of purpose, do you enkindle within your heart ardent desires of daily making greater progress in the ways of perfection?

#### 5. *Solicitude for the "Work of God."*

Examine into the manner in which you prepare to receive the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist; into the pious affections which you bring with you to these fountains of grace; and into the favours and blessings which you are able to draw thence. Have you certain devotional acts which you are accustomed to perform, and certain prayers which you are wont to say? With what fervour do you recite your morning and your evening prayers? Do you daily assist at Holy Mass, examine your conscience, read some spiritual work, meditate on some mystery of Our Lord's Passion, and by means of ejaculatory prayers, of internal converse with God, and of pious affections, endeavour to lift up your heart to heavenly things? In what way do you worship the most Holy Trinity, the Blessed Sacrament, and Christ suffering on the ignominious Cross? What reverence do you pay to the Blessed Virgin, to your Guardian Angel, to St. Joseph, to St. Benedict, and to your other holy



Patrons? How often do you confer with your Spiritual Father, about matters affecting the welfare of your soul? Do you ever, when a favourable opportunity presents itself, speak with your equals and with your companions about God, and about holy things, and in this way begin to show your zeal for the souls of men? How often do you exercise yourself in eliciting acts of faith, of hope, of love of God and of your neighbour?

#### 6. *Humility and Patience.*

Consider whether you are in the habit of attributing to God and not to yourself, whatever good you may perceive in yourself. Are you feelingly convinced that whatever evil there is in you, is the outcome of your own heart, and therefore that it must be attributed to yourself? Is there anyone to whom you prefer yourself? Do you excuse yourself, when you are either accused of, or corrected for any fault; and are you so cowardly as to tell a falsehood in order to escape punishment, or to deprecate the anger of those from whom you fear it? At your entrance into Religious Life, are you ready truly to take up the Cross of Jesus Christ? Do you frequently and fervently pray to God for the grace and the strength to suffer much for love of Him? When any adversity befalls you, does it fill you with dejection and make you desist from your good purposes? Do you suffer your indignation to break forth against those who are the occasions, or the causes of any mishap to you? Do you associate with those who, on account of the correction administered to them by Superiors, conspire to do them injury?

#### 7. *The Presence of God.*

Are you careful when alone, as well as when you are in the company of others, to observe that modesty and that gravity of behaviour, about which we have already laid down for your guidance certain rules and principles? Are you in the habit of being too soft and indulgent towards your body? In what way do you guard your senses, and how do you curb

the passions of your nature? Have you acquired the habit of imposing on yourself, with the advice of your Spiritual Father, certain slight bodily mortifications? How do you conduct yourself in point of sobriety in food, in drink, in abstinence from certain dainties and from more sumptuous fare? Do you aim at putting a restraint on your appetite with respect to meat and to drink? In eating and in drinking, is it your chief purpose to enjoy the natural pleasure which is to be derived from your food? Do you seek after, and strive to obtain delicate fare, and to be present at feasting? Are you fastidiously nice in the use of all the condiments that are placed on the table? Do you make it a practice to avoid strong and generous wines, partaking only of those that are ordinary? Do you, without any reasonable cause, either eat or drink out of meal-time? While at table, are you careful to season your meat and your drink with pious affections and holy aspirations? Do you ever, for love of God, impose on yourself some slight mortification when you are at table?

#### 8. *Perseverance.*

Are you firm in your resolve to enter the Cloister and to lead the Religious Life? Do you meet with hindrances and contradictions with respect to this resolve? Are you eager, as the time for your admission draws nigh, to make more strenuous efforts to present yourself to God, a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing unto Him?

After duly exercising your mind upon these considerations, be careful always to observe those counsels which are given in the beginning of the Synopsis.

## SECOND PART

# MEDITATIONS FOR THE RETREAT

WHICH PRECEDES THE RECEPTION OF THE  
HOLY HABIT

### PRELIMINARY INSTRUCTION.

Two things are requisite to ensure a successful issue to these Spiritual Exercises: first, the removal of those obstacles which either wholly or in part stand in the way of their beneficial influence; secondly, the employment of those means which serve to widen the sphere of their usefulness. Therefore, you who are about to quit the world in order to enter the Monastic or Religious State, must take special care to come to the Cloister, not in body only, but in soul and in mind also; leaving behind you all voluntary remembrance and all disorderly love of the world, of relatives, and of other things connected with the world. For, unless at the very outset you do this, you will create around yourself an atmosphere which will retard the growth of any fruit that might otherwise spring from these exercises, and you will put an effectual block in the way of your advancement in Religious Life. Banish from your mind all anxiety, all care, all sadness and every other disturbing element of whatever nature it may be. If any one of these should happen still to lurk in your heart, straightway with all frankness and sincerity manifest it to your Spiritual Father; otherwise you will not be at peace; consequently you will put a hindrance in the way of grace and will worry yourself to no purpose.

When you have thrust aside these obstacles, attend to the



admonition which our holy Father gives in the Prologue to his Rule: "Whatever good work thou dost begin, beg of God, with most earnest prayer, to perfect," and humbly ask the grace and the assistance of heaven to accomplish your noble undertaking. Then commending yourself to the guidance of Christ crucified, put yourself under the protection of our Lady, of your Angel, of St. Benedict, and of the other Saints, and intrust this important undertaking to their safe keeping. In the next place, gratefully acknowledge the favour bestowed on you by God Who has chosen you for this State in preference to many others, and Who permits you, in these exercises, so freely to approach to and to commune with Him about the important business of your eternal salvation. How many are there to whom are denied both the opportunity and the will of doing this! Therefore, since God puts these graces at your disposal, take heed that you receive them not in vain. Frequently in the course of these exercises encourage yourself with the words of our holy Father: "Let us therefore arise, since the Scripture stirreth us up and saith: 'It is now the hour for us to rise from sleep,' and our eyes being opened to the divine light, let us with wondering ears attend to the admonition which the divine voice daily addresseth to us, saying: 'To-day if you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts.'" Again: "Our Lord, fulfilling His promises, daily waiteth for us to answer, by our deeds, these His holy admonitions. Therefore, the days of our life are prolonged for the amendment of our evil deeds, according to these words of the Apostle: 'Knowest thou not that the patience of God leadeth thee to repentance?'"

Ponder within yourself, and ever keep in view, the purpose of these spiritual exercises. That purpose is to learn how to put off "the old man," and to put on "the new man." It is to develop within you the will to accomplish this difficult task; to turn your heart from evil and to make it do good; to cause you, by the labour of obedience, to return to God, from Whom you departed by the sloth of disobedience. Use every effort to compass these ends; and bear in mind

that by the "old man" is meant your former sinful life, while, by the "new man," you must understand the new life modelled upon that of Jesus Christ. In order to assist yourself in putting off the old man, endeavour to understand the malice and the gravity of sin, and conceive for it the utmost detestation and horror. Reading, followed by deep thought on that which you have read, will powerfully assist you in the acquisition of this knowledge and in the conception of this horror for sin. But in order to produce these beneficial effects, both your reading and your reflection must be made not in a superficial or in a careless way, but seriously and studiously, as beseems an action of which the aim is to acquire that salutary fear on which the foundation of the Spiritual Life is based. In the next place, during these days of retreat, make a survey of your whole past life, and if you discover that it has been defiled with the follies and the sins of youth, put off the old man with his acts, by means of a general confession; fill your heart with sorrow for and with detestation of, all your offences; and seriously resolve to lead so holy a life in the future as to please God and to atone for all your irregularities. Should your conscience not reproach you with any grievous sin, then humbly thank God for His careful watchfulness over you; but do not, on that account, omit to make a general confession; and, for the rest of your days, be on your guard against pride, conceit, presumption, and lukewarmness. With all sincerity acknowledge that you are the last and least of men. Avoid even the remote occasions of grievously offending God; and, since you have been favoured by Him with signal graces, endeavour, after the example of our Blessed Lady, to serve Him with greater fervour; for, although she was without spot or stain, nevertheless she was the humblest and most unassuming of His creatures. But if, presuming on the innocence of your former life, you begin to esteem yourself to be better than others are, to expose yourself to dangers, and gradually to fall into a tepid, negligent manner of life, you may with good reason fear that, in the Cloister, you will lose that which ought there to have been in the greatest

security. Terrible are the judgments of God with respect to those who are ungrateful, lukewarm, and presumptuous.

Furthermore, if being weak you fear a relapse into sin, on account of the bad habits which you have contracted in the world, or on account of some other cause, be not satisfied with simply standing in fear, but, with all sincerity and frankness, lay open your state to your Superior, and confer with him as to the best means of striking off, by God's grace, the chains which bind you. Unless, with all sincerity you do this, the lessons given you during the Novitiate will not bear any fruit; for, "Wisdom will not enter into a malicious soul, or dwell in a body subject to sins."

In order "to put on the new man," implant in your heart an intense love of, and a profound respect for, your vocation; and, for this purpose, spend some short time every day in reflecting on this inestimable benefit. Firmly resolve always to be grateful for it and so to shape your life as to correspond with it, and, by that means, to clothe yourself with the "new man." Let your efforts at self-reform consist in truly seeking God, in being prompt for the "Work of God," and in being ready for obedience and for humiliation. These are the four dispositions which our holy Father expects to find in every good Novice; and he who shall bring them with him to the Religious Life, will speedily be changed into another man. Therefore, the days of the spiritual exercises should be employed in earnestly endeavouring to acquire these dispositions, and in firmly resolving to act as he is sure to act, whose heart is animated with the fervour which they never fail to inspire.

Now that you clearly understand the full scope or purpose of these exercises, offer to God most fervent prayers and supplications, especially during Holy Mass and the visit to the Blessed Sacrament, that He would deign to accomplish in you this work, in a manner conformable with His holy will. For the same purpose, implore the powerful intercession of the Immaculate Mother of God, of our holy Father St. Benedict, and of your Patron Saints. Well knowing how important it is to make a good beginning, and that failure is



usually the result of every difficult work that is begun with carelessness and indifference, be determined to set about this matter of your Religious Life, with a large-hearted, generous love of God. Therefore, consider the right commencement of it to be a matter of as great moment as if your whole life, your progress in perfection, and your reward of heavenly glory depended upon it. "That man," says St. Dorotheus, "who, at the very outset, does violence to himself, denies himself, and perseveres in this course, will undoubtedly gain the victory over his passions and enjoy true rest and lasting peace." Therefore, kneeling before your crucifix, make a firm resolve, every morning to spring with modest alacrity from your bed; to overcome all repugnance arising from sensuality and from sloth; to offer your first thoughts to God and then to employ them in reflecting on the subject of that day's meditation; to begin and to go through each action with a good motive; to be observant of modesty and of silence; to avoid everything that may be an occasion of distraction, and exactly to adhere to the arrangement of time marked out in the "Horarium." But, as we cannot of ourselves do any good, implore with earnest prayer the divine assistance, through the most bitter Passion and death of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

#### PREPARATORY MEDITATION TO BE MADE ON THE DAY BEFORE THE RETREAT.

"Hearken, O my son, to the precepts of thy Master, and incline the ear of thy heart willingly to hear and effectually to accomplish the admonition of thy loving Father, that by the labour of obedience thou mayest return to Him from Whom thou didst depart by the sloth of disobedience."—*Prolog. in Regulam.*

1. How mild and affectionate is the greeting of our holy Father St. Benedict, to him who has just escaped from the storm-tossed ocean of the world, into the secure haven of monastic life! He calls him "son." What an honour and consolation it is to belong to the family of so illustrious a Father; to live under the protection of so powerful a patron; to be cared for by the forethought of so vigilant a guardian!

Only prove yourself to be a worthy son of so noble a Sire, and you will be rewarded in this life, you will be consoled in death, you will be crowned with glory in the world to come. Therefore, thank God with all your heart for having given you this Father, patron, and guardian; and having resolved worthily to prepare yourself for adoption into his family, be determined henceforth so to live as to be in very deed, and not in name only, a child of St. Benedict. For this purpose, consider what are the dispositions which he expects to find in those who aspire to be his children. They are three in number—namely, humbly to hearken to his precepts; willingly to accept them; and efficaciously to carry them out in practice.

2. He points out these dispositions clearly enough in the words: "Incline the ear of thy heart willingly to hear, and effectually to accomplish." Any one that does not possess these necessary dispositions, is unworthy to bear the name "child of St. Benedict." Therefore, an essential condition for the enjoyment of his fatherly protection is that, during the Retreat, during the whole Novitiate, and during your Religious Life, you should hearken to the admonitions of your Rule, to the instructions of your Superior, and to the inspirations of God, bestowed during prayer and spiritual exercises; that you should receive them with humility of heart; for, the knowledge of spiritual things is hidden from the wise and prudent, and is revealed to little ones; with a mind prompt, willing, and desirous of heavenly science; for, "a good ear will hear wisdom with all desire." If you listen with unwillingness and only on compulsion, what benefit can you possibly expect to derive from the lessons of wisdom? Finally give an attentive ear to all that is taught; apply to reading and to meditation, not for the purpose of sharpening your intelligence, but of making your will put in practice the instructions which you have received, the lessons which you have learned, and over which you have pondered. When an opportunity of so doing presents itself, rouse yourself into action by the argument which Christ addressed to the Jews who gloried in being the sons of Abraham, without, however,

caring to practise the virtues of Abraham: "If you are the children of Abraham, do the works of Abraham," intimating by these words that the privilege of which they boasted would be profitless to them unless their lives corresponded in brilliancy of virtue with the honourable and noble source whence they gloried to have sprung. In like manner it will profit you nothing to be called a son of St. Benedict, unless you endeavour to love that which he loved and to practise that which he taught. What then is your resolution in this respect?

3. The reason for which these dispositions are requisite, not only during the days of your retreat, but during the period of your probation, is to be found in these words of our holy Father: "That by the labour of obedience thou mayest return to Him, from Whom thou didst depart by the sloth of disobedience," or, as we have already said, that you may put off the old man and may clothe yourself with the new man; that you may decline from evil and may do good by the aid of the various means which will be suggested to you in the following meditations, in your spiritual reading, in the exercises and the instructions which are to come, each in its due time and place. All that you have to do at present, is firmly to resolve to bring with you to these instructions a docile heart and a will ready to carry out in act the lessons which they impart. But, in order to strengthen this resolve, consider well the necessity for it. So indispensable is this resolve that, without its support, you will never be able to obtain the object of your desire; for, as St. Bernard says: "The ardent lover of obedience will not bestow on the disobedient man so great an outpouring of His own Spirit, as that he will prefer to die rather than not to obey." Yet, fear not the phrase, "by the *labour* of obedience"; for, if at the time when you were disobedient to His precepts, you did not hesitate, as the Prophet insinuates, to make God weary with your sins, how can you refuse to endure labour for His sake, in satisfaction for your misdeeds? But if, by the assistance of God's grace, you have hitherto kept yourself free from every stain of grievous sin, and if, on that



account, you think yourself exempt from the obligation of labouring in the work of obedience, it is to be feared that you have but a very inadequate notion of the magnitude of so unspeakable a favour ; for, if you had a right notion of it, you would perceive, in very truth, that it is not owing to any innate power of your own, but to the merits of Christ and the infinite loving kindness of God. Ought it then to be a subject of complaint that you must, by means of a little labour endured in conformity with God's will, gratefully acknowledge the labour which Christ underwent, the wounds which He received, and the death which He suffered for your sake ? Carefully weigh all these matters, and, from the consideration of them, form for yourself suitable resolutions.

## FIRST DAY

### MEDITATION I.

#### RISING FROM SLEEP.

"Let us, therefore, at last arise, since the Scripture stirreth us up and saith: 'It is now the hour for us to arise from sleep.'"—*Prolog. in Regulam.*

I. THERE is a threefold kind of sleep, in which the bulk of men pass their youth. Some of them fall into it at the very dawn of reason. These are they who, although endowed with faith and with the other virtues flowing from the grace of baptism, yet when they reach the years of discretion, take no pains seriously and effectually to turn to their last end. In consequence of not so doing, and because they are stupefied by the vapours of their evil passions, they lead an animal rather than a rational life.

Others pass the spring-tide of their life in all the freshness of spiritual strength and vigour, but little by little, through the influence of wicked companions, or through that concupiscence which is born with us, their bloom fades away, their strength dries up, and they sink into the wretched slumber of vice, verifying in themselves that which the Apostle wrote of the Galatians: "They began in the spirit and they would now be made perfect by the flesh."\*

Again, there are others who, by a singular mercy of God, have not been overcome by the sleep of mortal sin, and yet they are in grievous danger, because they pass their youth in a torpor of soul, little befitting those who have been so highly favoured; they are guilty of a multitude of venial sins in their service of God and in matters pertaining to their

\* *Gal. iii. 3.*

eternal salvation ; they live in no small danger of being, at last, oppressed with the sleep of deadly sin, when their spiritual strength has been quite exhausted.

To which of these classes do you belong ? How have you passed the years of your youth ? Seriously weigh these matters, and let your heart be moved with affections suitable to the thoughts which your mind will suggest.

2. No matter in which of the aforesaid kinds of sleep you may have heretofore passed your life, you must at last arise from a torpor which is at once so hurtful and so full of the deadliest peril. You must arise without delay ; for this, according to interpreters, is the meaning of the phrase : " Let us arise." You have slept long enough. Oh, how many before you have slept their sleep, and they have not awakened from it, till the time for never-ending watching had begun ! Behold, through the loving-kindness of God, there is given to you the opportunity of anticipating and of avoiding, by timely vigilance, the dread wakefulness of the eternal prison-house. Why then do you delay ?

3. Weigh with careful thought these words of the Apostle : " It is now the hour for us to arise from sleep." By them, St. Benedict endeavours to rouse you from your slumber. Consider the many hours which in your past life you have spent in sin, in lukewarmness, in blameworthy idleness, and in the other faults of your youthful years. It is with reference to these hours that the Apostle says to you : " Through the loving kindness of God, now at last has come the hour in which, by a speedy and serious turning to Him, you may redeem the time that is past." Moreover, remember that during all these hours the Divine Goodness has patiently borne with you and awaited your repentance. Now He announces to you, by the mouth of His Apostle, that the hour has come. If you suffer it to pass unheeded, mercy will give place to justice, and kindness will be turned into wrath. In the words of the Prophet, God says : " I have always held my peace, I have kept silence, I have been patient. I will speak now as a woman in labour."\* Also,

\* *Isaias* xlii. 14.



these words of the Apostle, "For, now our salvation is nearer than we believed," will powerfully help to shake from their lethargic slumber the souls of those who have composed themselves to sleep. Oh, if you did but truly believe with a living faith that your salvation depends upon the good use which you make of this very hour, how speedily would you put an end to all delay! You would not suffer a single moment of precious time to slip away without turning with all your heart unto God, Who so lovingly invites you to Himself.

## MEDITATION II.

### ATTENTION TO THE VOICE OF GOD.

"And our eyes being opened to the divine light, let us with wondering ears attend to the admonition which the divine voice daily addresseth to us, saying: 'To-day if you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts.'"—*Prol. in Regulam.*

1. As on waking from natural sleep, we once again resume the full vigour and the full use of our bodily senses, so also ought we to arise to full spiritual activity when, by sincere repentance, we awake out of the sleep of a life that has been passed in vice and in neglect of duty. But it is the mind's eye that, in accordance with the admonition of our holy Father, we are especially to open to the divine light and the soul's ear, to the sweet accents of the divine voice. Therefore, hasten to obey so salutary an exhortation, and as by the preceding meditation you have shaken off all torpor of mind, delay not to open wide your eyes, which act is the first that is performed by one who is awaking from sleep. manifold and very brilliant are the lights which Our good God displays before you. The reasoning faculty given to you, in preference to so many other creatures, is that light concerning which the Psalmist says: "The light of Thy countenance is signed upon us, O Lord!"\* Your calling to the Catholic Church is that light of which St. Peter writes: "Who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light."† The divine inspirations are the lights of which King David says:

\* Ps. iv. 7.

† 1 Pet. ii. 9.

“Thou enlightenest wonderfully from the everlasting hill.”\* Finally, by His most holy teaching and by the example of His most blameless life, Our Redeemer, Jesus Christ, is the Light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world. Therefore, in another place He says of Himself: “I am the Light of the world.”† Open then your eyes to gaze on these lights, and see whether it may not, with truth, be said of you also: “He loved darkness rather than the light.”‡ Deplore your lamentable blindness, and, opening wide your eyes, consider and resolve carefully to accomplish, in the future, that unto which sound reason, faith, God, and Christ exhort you.

2. Not only your eyes must be opened to the divine light, but your ears must be opened to the divine voice. God has a voice by which He calls men to the knowledge and the love of Himself; and, if they have sinned, to the doing of penance. This voice calls to us through created things, which all and everywhere proclaim the wonderful wisdom, omnipotence, and goodness of God: “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament declareth His handiwork.”§ If men ungratefully turn a deaf ear to this voice, and, abandoning God, pour forth their love on created objects, He does not cease, on that account, in a thousand wonderful ways, to call them to repentance? How have you listened to His voice? By listening to it, what advance have you made in the knowledge and the love of God? Have you not far more frequently given your ear to the voice of the world, the flesh, and the devil, each of which flattered you? Therefore, now at least, hearken with astonished ears to the voice of the Lord calling you to penance; otherwise you may, with good reason, fear that He will one day address to you the terrible reproof: “I called, and you refused; I also will laugh in your destruction.”||

3. Consider, in particular, what Our good God, by the mouth of the Prophet, deigns to say to your heart: “To-day, if you shall hear His voice, harden not your heart.”¶ By

\* Ps. lxxv. 5.  
§ Ps. xviii. 1.

† St. John viii. 12.  
|| Prov. i. 24, 26.

‡ Idem., iii. 19.  
¶ Ps. xciv. 8.

these words, what else does He ask of you than that you should take away from your heart all hardness that hinders it from accepting the divine inspirations; that you should straightway resolve to give these inspirations a most cordial welcome; that, rejecting with scorn the suggestions of the world, the flesh, and the devil, to all which you have lent a too ready ear, and by so doing have turned your heart to stone—you should now, at last, eagerly desire to hear the whisperings of the Divine Word. Who is there that would not desire to do so? Who is so bold and so senseless as to refuse to attend to the Lord of Majesty, when that Lord deigns to speak to him? “How prodigious is our folly,” says St. Bernard, “if, while the Lord is speaking to us, we senselessly turn away from Him to busy ourselves about irrelevant trifles!” How gross and deserving of chastisement is the insult which we worms of the earth offer to Him, when we will not condescend to listen to that which He says to us. Yet, how great and how unutterable is the loving kindness of Our good God, Who every day looks on us as we turn away our ears and harden our hearts! In spite of evil doing He speaks to us and cries out to us in the streets, yea, in the very streets; for, He calls to us with the far-reaching compass of His infinite love. Behold, O Lord! Thou needest none of our goods, and yet Thou dost say: “Be converted, O ye sons of men!” Thou dost exclaim: “Return, return, O Sunamitess; return, return that we may behold thee!”\* Weigh well these words of the saintly Doctor, and conclude this meditation with an earnest prayer that God would take away the stony heart from your bosom, give you a heart of flesh, and enshrine His own Holy Spirit in the midst of it.

\* *Sermo xxiii. de Diversis.*



## MEDITATION III.

## THE FEAR OF GOD.

“‘He that hath ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the Churches.’ What saith He? ‘Come, ye children, and hearken unto me. I will teach you the fear of the Lord.’”—*Prol. in Regulam.*

1. Consider now, what has to be done, when your torpor of mind has been shaken off; when your eyes and your ears have been opened; and when the hardness of your heart has been taken away. In the first place and before everything else, you must learn to *fear* the Lord; for, it is written: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”\* St. Bernard explains, in an admirable manner, the necessity for this fear, and also its various offices. He says: “There is nothing that so effectually merits the grace of God, preserves it when once it has been obtained, and recovers it, when it has been lost, as never at any time to be high-minded, but rather to stand in lowly fear.”† At present you are chiefly concerned about the recovery of divine grace which you have, perhaps, lost by the sins of your youth. But if, through a singular mercy of God, you have until the present day, kept it safely enshrined in the sanctuary of your heart, you must strain every nerve to hold it fast and to merit a daily increase of your store. Therefore, you must become a docile scholar in learning the fear of the Lord. “Fear,” continues St. Bernard, “when grace is with you; fear, when it departs from you and when it once again returns to you; this is always to be in a state of fear. Blessed is the man who is always full of fear.”

2. If grace depart from you, how will the fear of God enable you to recover it, and, when once recovered, to keep it in your possession? “When grace is withdrawn,” says St. Bernard, “fear lest you may straightway fall into sin. Fear, because you perceive that God is angry with you. Fear, because He has ceased to guard you.” This fear will cause you not to remain for a single moment subject to the

\* Ps. cx. 10.

† *Sermo liv. in Cantic.*

displeasure of Him Who is able to cast both soul and body into hell. It will make you strive with your whole heart, to return to your God, and, in every possible way, to use all the various means recommended by the Church, to appease His offended Majesty. "If grace is recovered," proceeds St. Bernard, "fear still more lest you should fall back into sin, according to these words of the Gospel: 'Behold thou art made whole. Go, and sin no more, lest some worse thing happen to thee.'" - Do you hear? To relapse into sin is much worse than to fall into it for the first time. Hence, because the danger is now much greater, let your fear also increase in intensity. "This fear ought to stir you up to make use of efficacious means for self-correction, for avoiding occasions, for overcoming bad habits, for taming the passions, and for conquering temptations. Unless it engender in your soul some such resolves as these, you will not be able, for any length of time, to preserve the grace which you have recovered. If you lose it, how great will be your loss! Therefore, be ever full of fear, lest so lamentable an evil should befall you.

3. Lastly, consider the effect which the fear of the Lord produces in the soul, when grace is present within it: "When grace is with you," says St. Bernard, "fear lest you may not make a good use of it." The Apostle addresses to us a similar warning: "See that you receive not the grace of God in vain."\* Writing to his disciple Timothy, he says: "Neglect not the grace that is within thee."† Also, speaking of himself, he says: "The grace of God that is in me hath not been void."‡ For, being filled with the knowledge of God, he was well aware that the neglect of a gift, or the use of it for any other purpose than that for which it was intended by the giver, is an insult to him.

Moreover, when writing to the Corinthians, he says: "Let him that thinketh himself to stand, take heed lest he fall."§ Those who are not conscious of having committed any grave sin ought carefully to lay up in their minds this warning, in

\* 2 Cor. vi. 1.

† 1 Cor. xv. 10.

‡ 1 Tim. iv. 14.

§ *Idem*, x. 12.

order always to live in salutary fear; for, as sinners ought to fear because they *have* fallen, so ought also the just to fear because they *may* fall. Let them be afraid of themselves and of their own weakness; let them not presume on their own strength; or prefer themselves to others; or in any way be guilty of pride. Let them not think that they are quite secure; or incautiously go into danger; or expose themselves to the peril of sin; let them not set themselves up as guides in the Spiritual Life, or ever cease imploring, with most fervent prayer, the aid of divine grace. If they neglect to do these things they may fall at any moment. Therefore, let him who thinketh himself to stand, take heed lest he fall.

Unless you solidly build yourself up in these lowly sentiments of fear, you will speedily be overthrown. Therefore, follow the advice of the Wise Man: "Keep the fear of God, and grow old therein."\*

\* *Ecclus.* ii. 6.



## SECOND DAY

### MEDITATION I.

#### GIRDING THE LOINS.

“Our loins, therefore, being girt with faith and with the observance of good works, and our feet being shod with the guidance of the Gospel of peace, let us walk in His ways.”—*Prol. in Regulam.*

I. THE Religious State is very properly called “the way of the Lord,” both because it is the King’s high-road leading direct to God, and because in it are especially exercised those virtues and those evangelical counsels which Jesus Christ, Who calls Himself the Way, has taught us both by word and by example. In order to make the entrance to this way an easy one, our holy Father, in the above-cited words, suggests to us the dispositions which will cause us to make little account of the seeming obstacles which stand before us. Do you, therefore, who are now at the very entrance of this way, attentively listen, that you may the more readily catch what these dispositions are, and may diligently employ the means which will procure them for you. But first raise your mind to God, and return to Him most heart-felt thanks for having pointed out to you this path, and humbly beseech Him to give you grace to enter it, and to traverse its whole length in such a manner as will please His divine Majesty.

The first disposition necessary for entering this way is to gird up your loins. Commenting on these words, Turrecremata says : “If we desire speedily and without hindrance to run along this way, we must gird up the loins both of our body and of our mind.” Chastity girds up the loins of our body, in reference to which virtue Our Lord says : “Let

your loins be girt"; and St. Gregory: "We gird up our loins, when, by self-restraint, we repress the luxury of the flesh." But it is by faith and by the practice of good works, that we gird up the loins of our mind. Weigh well these words; for, it is upon the exact performance of that which they inculcate that your progress in the Religious Life will depend.

Therefore, your loins must be girt with the girdle of chastity. What eagerness do you display to possess this angelic virtue? Be assured that, unless it be an eagerness so great and vehement as to cause you to prefer death rather than incur dishonour, you will never find out the King's highway in the Religious State, but you will travel along the brink of frightful chasms, over which God grant that you may never slip and fall headlong into the yawning abyss!

2. You must be girt with the girdle of faith and of good works. For, he who wishes securely to travel this road must be equipped with the principles of faith; he must cast far from him all worldly prudence and worldly maxims, which are contrary to that true Christian wisdom and to that unvarying rule of faith which Jesus Christ, both by word and by example, has put before all His followers.

3. In addition to faith, you must have good works; for, faith without works is dead. St. Bernard, speaking to the same purpose, says: "Do you believe in Christ? Then, do the works of Christ, in order that your faith may be a living faith, that love may put life into your faith, and that action may prove that your faith is alive." What are your sentiments upon these matters? Pray unto God, and with respect to them make strong and serious resolves.

4. Another disposition necessary for making this journey without ever stumbling on the way, is that your feet should be well shod. By the feet of the soul are usually understood the affections which must, by means of virtues, be protected against the various hurtful obstacles to be met with in the service of the Lord; just as our feet are shod to protect them from the stones of the highway. This protection of the affections is brought about in two ways. First, by

cultivating the virtues which are opposed to the vicious habits heretofore contracted, so that, if up to the present time you have been slothful in the service of God, you must now be industrious; if heretofore drowsy, now wakeful; if heretofore given up to the pleasures of taste, now sober and abstemious; if unchaste, now pure of heart; if attached to self-will, now obedient in all things. Secondly, by aiming at solid virtue; for, he who pursues only the shadow of virtue will always be exposed to the danger of dashing his feet against the stones and of yielding to the temptations which invariably attack those who are about to undertake this journey. Therefore, wisely accept this salutary advice, and in due time make provision for the successful prosecution of the journey of your Religious Life. Fix your eyes on the holy Fathers who in so great numbers have preceded you on this royal way, and continually beseech Our Lord to give you the grace courageously to tread in their footsteps.

## MEDITATION II.\*

### KNOWLEDGE OF OUR LAST END.

“Let us, therefore, now prepare our hearts and our bodies to fight under the holy obedience of His commands.”—*Prol. in Regulam.*

*First Preparation: the Knowledge of our Last End, and of the Benefit of Creation.*

1. From all eternity God was most happy in Himself. He had need of nothing whatever. Yet, out of His infinite goodness, being desirous of communicating Himself to His creatures, He, in the beginning, created the heavens, the earth, the whole fabric of the universe, and completed His labour on the sixth day. On that same day, when the world was furnished with every variety of created objects, and when all things had been established in their due order,

\* This and the four succeeding Meditations treat of the preparation necessary, on the part both of the soul and of the body, for entering either the Benedictine or any other Religious Order.



He created man, to His own image and likeness, and set him over the fishes of the sea, the birds of the air, the beasts of the field, the whole earth and over every creeping thing that moveth upon the face of the earth. Therefore, whatever exists in the heavens and in the wide circuit of the earth, has been made for man's use and benefit. The Angels were created, in a certain sense, to keep him in all his ways; the heavens, to be his everlasting abode; the heavenly bodies, to concur, as universal causes, by their movement and by their influence, in the preservation and the renovation of mankind and of all inferior creatures; the four elements, stones, plants, animals, the heavenly bodies and minerals, to preserve his life, to heal his maladies, to comfort him and to afford him pleasure during his mortal pilgrimage. Have you ever reflected on this immense, this unspeakable benefit of creation, by which, without any foregoing merit on his part, but solely through the boundless love of God, man has been raised to so sublime a pre-eminence over all the other creatures of the earth? Who will not cry out with the Psalmist: "What is man that Thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that Thou shouldst visit him?"\* After recalling all these blessings and privileges, reason thus with yourself: this immense benefit is so common to the whole human family, that it nevertheless touches in particular each member of that family; therefore that benefit touches me. Has, then, the God of infinite majesty, Who needeth not my goods, been from all eternity mindful of me? Has He, setting aside so many other possible beings, given me existence, and not any low form of existence, but one so excellent as is that of man who is made to the image and likeness of God Whom all created things obey and serve? Then, turning to God, say with St. Augustine: "Whence is this to me, O most loving, most high God, most merciful Father, most powerful Creator, and ever most gentle, what are my deserts, what is the grace with which I am endowed, that Thou shouldst be pleased to call me into being? O wisdom Who openest the mouths of the speechless; O Word by

\* *Ps. viii. 5.*

Whom all things are made, open Thou my mouth ; give me the voice of praise, and I will recount all the mercies which, from the beginning, Thou hast bestowed upon me.”\*

Deplore your own and other men’s ingratitude, in not estimating at its right value this most excellent benefit.

2. The ultimate end for which God created these and many other objects is that man may know, love, and serve Him. This is the end appointed by God for every man, without exception. If man attain it, he will be eternally happy ; if he do not, he will be for ever miserable. It is God’s will that material things should serve man, in order that man himself may serve God. God has made an infinite variety of them. He has multiplied them beyond measure. He has bestowed on them magnitude, beauty, power, perfection, that from the contemplation of these attributes man may learn the omnipotence, the wisdom, and the goodness of the Creator, and may love Him with a love far surpassing that with which he loves any created thing whatever. If man will but give to God a love such as this, God promises to Him a life of eternal happiness ; if, however, neglecting God, he fastens the love of his heart on created things, and serves them, God threatens him with pains and penalties that will last for ever. Therefore, carefully examine into the life which you have heretofore led. Has it been in conformity with an end of such sublime dignity ? Have you, from the first dawn of reason till this present hour, spent your years in the way in which you are obliged to spend them—in knowing, loving, and serving your Creator ? How many hours, days, weeks, months, and perhaps whole years have you devoted to the love and the service of earthly and most worthless things ? Arise, therefore, now at last ; detest your former slothfulness ; make a firm purpose of amendment ; from this moment begin, as it were, for the first time, to make a right use of your reason ; consecrate the faculties of your soul, your body, your whole self to the love and the service of God. The greater has been the length of time which you have devoted to the service of the world and

\* *Soliloq.*, cap. vii.

to the love of its vanities, the more intense ought to be the earnestness and the fervour with which you should now be animated.

3. Consider what an excellent opportunity Our good God affords you for carrying your firm resolve into effect, by calling you, in preference to so many others, unto the Religious State. The world subjects its votaries to a wretched bondage, and in this way withdraws them from the service of their lawful Master ; for, no one can serve two masters. It feeds them with the love of temporal goods and of abominable pleasures, and in this way leaves them without any love for their Creator, the supreme and only good ; for, two loves so contrary to each other cannot at the same time find a resting-place in the same heart. Religious Life, on the other hand, has this one end in view—to free those who enter it, from the tyrannical slavery of the world ; to remove from their path whatever is prejudicial to a sincere love of the Creator Who is most worthy of all their love ; and to furnish them with all the most efficacious means for making continual progress in the service and the love of God. Give thanks for so singular a grace, and firmly purpose to make a good use of these most excellent opportunities for laying up for yourself treasures in the kingdom of heaven.

### MEDITATION III.

#### HORROR AND HATRED OF SIN.

*The Second Preparation : Knowledge of the Gravity of Sin—  
Deep Horror and Hatred which this Knowledge ought  
to inspire.*

1. Sin is the greatest of evils. Among those things which the world calls evil, it is the only real evil, because it is only sin that attacks God Himself Who is the true, the essential good. Sin strives to snatch Him away from man, whereas all other evils that are so much dreaded by us—such as war, famine, fire, pestilence—cannot deprive us of our true good. Consider, therefore, why it is that we so little fear that



greatest of evils as to thrust ourselves of our own free will into it ; whereas we dread with genuine terror, and by every means in our power strive to escape from those temporal ills which are ills only in appearance. Oh ! the blindness of mortal man ! Do you, at least, open your eyes ; look into yourself ; and find out what progress you have made in hatred and in horror of every sin ; and know for certain, that unless you entertain for it a horror which is appreciatively supreme, you will never taste of the liberty and the felicity which the Religious State promises to those who, with proper dispositions, enter it.

2. God is in Himself the supremely good Creator, Preserver, Redeemer, Judge, and Benefactor of mankind. Consequently, man is bound faithfully to serve Him and to love Him above all created things, with an appreciatively supreme love. But, by sinning, man rebels against Him, under each of these titles, and, shaking off the yoke, says : " I will not serve." He fastens his whole love on objects the foulest and most worthless, and by his act throws the heavenly Court and all its bright inhabitants into a stupor of sorrow and amazement. Therefore it is that God Himself cries out : " Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and ye gates thereof be very desolate. For, My people have done two evils. They have forsaken Me, the Fountain of living water, and have digged for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water." \* Reflect upon each of God's titles : Creator, Preserver, Redeemer, Judge, Benefactor ! Oh, if you had but known and clearly understood them, how could you have dared in the past, how will you ever dare in the future, to abandon and forget that supreme, essential Good, that most loving Father to whom you are indebted for your very existence ? Is this the return which you make to Him Who has preserved you ? Is it thus that you treat Him Who, for love of you, took on Himself human nature, Who was born in a stable and laid in a manger ? Is it thus that you behave towards Him Who, being preserved amidst countless pains, injuries, and miseries, to die for you, under-

\* *Jerem. ii. 12.*

went an agony and a sweat of blood ; Who was violently seized by His enemies, hurried and dragged through the streets, struck by His captors, falsely accused, scourged, crowned with thorns, mocked, loaded with the Cross, crucified, and Who, at last, amid unspeakable torments, gave up His soul to God ? Have you been so bold as to maltreat Him Who is able to cast both soul and body into hell ; Who will come to judge the living and the dead ; Who will render to every one according to his works ? Is this the gratitude which you manifest towards Him Who, in addition to the afore-mentioned benefits, has heaped on you many others which are not perceived by the bodily senses ? Without any merit on your part, but solely through His loving condescension, He has called you into His most marvellous light by the Catholic Faith and by baptism, while at the same time He has suffered so many thousands to grope in the darkness of unbelief. By His sweet and wonderful providence, He has led, taught, and guarded you as the apple of His eye. Over you He has spread the wings of His fatherly protection ; He has taken you up and carried you in His arms. Finally, to say nothing of other benefits which are too numerous to be mentioned, He has established you in the Holy Land of Religious Life, to eat the fruits of the field ; to suck from the rock the sweetest honey of spiritual consolation ; to enjoy the oil of heavenly unction ; to partake of the butter and the milk, of the fat of the land, of the marrow of wheat and of the deep red blood of the grape, all which may, in a spiritual sense, be most aptly understood of the good things of the Religious Life. Oh, if you had but attentively revolved in your mind these and similar thoughts, could it have come to pass that, after being so enriched and so highly favoured in every possible way, you would abandon the Lord your Creator and depart from God your Saviour ?

3. How wretched is the state of a Religious who is not filled with an appreciatively supreme horror of sin ! For, if we consider his state with respect to mortal sin, it is evident—and we shudder as we think of it—that he is living in peril of eternal damnation. Moreover, while he is in this truly

pitiable condition, every action that he performs in virtue of ordinary obedience, he puts into a sack pierced with holes. It is impossible for such a one to enjoy a single moment of true peace. But, if we look at his condition with respect to venial sin, we must acknowledge that, if he is habitually given up to these defects, it is as impossible for him ever to obtain any mental repose, as it is for one who is loaded with fetters to walk freely. Furthermore, it is to be feared—and this is not by any means a matter of rare occurrence—that, as a punishment of his ingratitude, God will abandon him to a state of lukewarmness and to the blindness which springs from it. In consequence of this abandonment he will by degrees fall into graver sins; then into a habit of sin and into a kind of spiritual lethargy; afterwards, into contempt; and at last into final impenitence. Having thus become reprobate, he will incur that punishment which will last for eternity. From an attentive consideration of these evil consequences, you will clearly understand how necessary for him who wishes to enter Religious Life, is this second preparation. Therefore, make efficacious resolutions with respect to everything that has reference to it.



## THIRD DAY

### MEDITATION I.

#### ESTEEM AND LOVE OF YOUR CALLING—DESIRE OF WINNING PERFECTION—GOODWILL.

1. YOU cannot have failed to remark how negligently, and in what an offhand manner, men are accustomed to treat those things which they neither esteem nor love. Also, it cannot have escaped your notice that the love and the esteem which they have for any object infuse so great vigour into their actions as to cause them willingly, and with exactitude to do everything that is in any way connected with that which they esteem and love. Hence it is evident that your advance in the Religious Life will depend on the love and the esteem which you have for your calling. Many and forcible are the arguments which might be adduced to prove this statement. However, we will bring forward only one; listen attentively to it; for, in it is contained the comparison which St. Bernard makes between the Religious and the Secular Life.

“In the Monastery life is contemplative, in the world it is active; in the Monastery life is saintly, in the world it is sinful; in the Monastery life is spiritual, in the world it is carnal; in the Monastery life is heavenly, in the world it is earthly; in the Monastery life is peaceful, in the world it is full of contention; in the Monastery life is tranquil, in the world it is full of unrest; in the Monastery life is chaste, in the world it is given over to luxury; in the Monastery life is perfect, in the world it is full of defects; in the Monastery life is virtuous, in the world it is vicious;

in the Monastery life is just, in the world it is unjust.”\* This and much more to the same purpose concerning the Benedictine Order in particular, you will find in the succeeding meditations. But, for the present, let that which has been said suffice to convince you of the necessity for this love, in order that if you still feel yourself somewhat remiss in this respect, you may strive, by every means in your power, to stir up the flagging energy of your heart. But, at the same time that you esteem and love your own calling, beware of contemning, or of feeling an aversion from the other States of Life and from the other Religious Orders. This kind of love is not of God; “for, charity envieth not, dealeth not perversely, it is not puffed up.”†

2. In order that your love of your calling may be solid, it must be joined with a great desire of reaching that degree of perfection which may be obtained in it. He who loves his calling for any other purpose than for that of winning the perfection which may be gained in it, does not, in reality, abandon the world; he only covers his worldliness with the monastic habit. Therefore, if you wish to follow the Religious Life, you must bring with you to the Cloister a great desire of perfection. But if you esteem and love your calling either because you think that in it your manner of life will be easier, your food richer, your drink more pleasant, your leisure more abundant, or because you hope to be advanced to dignities and to honours, you will be wretched indeed; for, your soul will lack that preparation which would make you savour the things that are of God. In order, then, that your desire of perfection may be strong and ardent, bear in mind that God liberally communicates Himself to those who eagerly aspire to perfection, according to these well-known words: “Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice, for, they shall have their fill;”‡ or, as our Lady expresses it in her Canticle: “He hath filled the hungry with good things.”§ Therefore, stir up within yourself this desire, in order that you may largely share in the outpouring of His liberality.

\* St. Bernard, *Epist. ad Sororem*.

† St. Matt. v. 6.

‡ 1 Cor. xiii. 4.

§ St. Luke i. 53.

3. As the way of perfection is very narrow, it is necessary, if you wish to walk in it with evenness of mind, that you should bring with you a willingness to accept all that you will be taught by your Master and by spiritual books, no matter how repugnant to your natural inclination, to your notions of honour, and to your self-love both his and their teaching may chance to be. The special reward of this goodwill is that constant tranquillity which was announced by Angelic Choirs on that night when Our Saviour first entered this world: "And on earth peace to men of goodwill." But an evilly-disposed will puts an effectual stop to the influx of those spiritual favours which ought to flood the soul; for, "wisdom will not enter a malicious soul." However, as all other good and perfect gifts follow in the wake of wisdom—"all other good things came to me with her"—so these, her sevenfold gifts, will flow past us if she will not enter our hearts. In order, therefore, that you may clearly understand in what consists that goodwill which is of so vital importance to you, we will here point out the marks by which it may be known. (1) A truly goodwill has that man who prefers to die a thousand deaths rather than, by mortal sin, to offend Almighty God. (2) Who will not deliberately commit even a venial sin; and if he should have the misfortune to do so, will grieve for his transgression. (3) Whose only anxiety is, lest he should lose his heavenly home and God. (4) Who frequently laments over his sins, and firmly resolves never more to repeat them. (5) Who distrusts himself, and places all his confidence in God. (6) Who willingly receives correction; who is not filled with indignation; who humbly resolves to amend that for which he has been corrected. (7) Who, with the superior part of his soul, patiently accepts all adversities as sent by God; thinks that he has deserved them; and for all things gives God thanks. (8) Who is not headstrong; who gladly listens to and follows the advice of the wise. For, goodwill is simple-minded; in its own affairs it has a higher esteem of other men's judgment than it has of its own. (9) Who neither wills nor desires to will anything else than that which God wills; who entirely commits him-



self to the providence of God, even in matters repugnant to sensitive nature. (10) Who, in the depth of his heart, desires not, seeks not, fears not anything save only God. (11) Who is content with all that God arranges; who approves of it as being the best that could happen. (12) Who gladly accepts occasions of humbling himself and of withdrawing himself from the notice of men; who loves not the world; who ardently sighs after heaven and eagerly strives to imitate the Saints, in order that he may be admitted into their blessed company. Examine whether your will has any of these marks, and if it has not, at least desire to have them; for, he who truly wishes to have goodwill is, without doubt, already in possession of it.

## MEDITATION II.

### DISTRUST OF ONE'S SELF—CONFIDENCE IN GOD— PRAYER.

1. All these preparatory dispositions will be worth nothing, unless they be accompanied by distrust of self, by confidence in God, and by all-powerful prayer. Therefore, understand well that without the aid of God and the merits of Christ, you are utterly incapable of doing any supernaturally good action; for, Our Lord says: "Without Me, you can do nothing";\* and St. Paul: "We are not sufficient (that is to say, able) to think anything of ourselves, as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God."† Hence it is evident that you must be deeply penetrated with a sense of your own weakness. Therefore, be altogether distrustful of yourself; for, so great are the weakness, helplessness, and inconstancy of the human will, that no trust either can be or ought to be put in it, especially when, as in the present instance, there is question of actions that surpass the force of nature. Consider, then, the horrible condition of even the most excellent men who, putting too great trust in their strength, are in a moment cast down headlong and thrust

\* *St. John* xv. 5.

† *2 Cor.* iii. 5.

into hell. From their wretched fate learn wisdom, and, with an utter distrust of self, begin to pursue the course of your spiritual life.

2. Because of your exceedingly great weakness, you must never either withdraw from or give up your good resolutions, even when you find yourself in the midst of the gravest difficulties; with all the more earnestness have recourse to Our good God, by means of complete trust in Him. As, then, "all our sufficiency is from God" \* Who giveth abundantly to all men; Who suffereth not any one to be tempted beyond his strength; Who is able and willing to help us; and Who knows how to help us in all our necessities; in the might of Whose power we can do all things,—what else must we do than persevere in confidence the which we have towards Christ and God? Therefore, from this time forth, commit yourself to the most loving protection of God, by having recourse in all your necessities to Him Who says: "Because he hoped in Me, I will deliver him; I will protect him because he hath known My name." † In His service never lose courage on account of the negligences and the faults which you commit; but, having humbly acknowledged them and blotted them out by repentance, arise with new courage, and never give up the good work which you have undertaken. "No one hath hoped in the Lord and hath been confounded." ‡

3. From the avowal of your weakness, from the acknowledgment of the goodness of God and His power to succour you in all your needs, there springs prayer, by which we beseech Him, through His divine grace, to effect that which our frail nature is of itself unable to accomplish. To the constant exercise of this holy action, especially at the beginning of every good work, St. Benedict most earnestly exhorts each of his children, saying: "Whatever good work thou dost begin, beg of Him with most earnest prayer to perfect." §

The work which you are undertaking is one of great importance; therefore, it would be a mark of presumption

\* 2 Cor. iii. 5.    † Ps. xc. 14.    ‡ Ecclus. ii. 11.    § Prol. in Reg.

in you to begin it without most earnest prayer. Consider with what ardour our holy Father, when fleeing from Rome to undertake his Religious Life, commended himself to God and implored the divine aid. His example and that of the other Saints of our Order, who with most fervent prayer began their Monastic Life, will teach you to go and do in like manner. Therefore, in this respect, tread in the footsteps of those who have gone before you.

### MEDITATION III.

#### THE PREPARATION REQUISITE ON THE PART OF THE BODY.

1. God must be worshipped by man, not with his body only, or with his soul only, but with his whole being. This is only just ; for, God has given Himself entirely unto man, and from God's hands man has received all the good that he possesses. Therefore, after having meditated on the preparation for the service of God necessary on the part of the soul, you must now consider what preparation is requisite on the part of the body. Your first disposition with respect to the body must be that, regarding it in no other light than in that of an instrument, or a servant of the soul, you should treat it in a way befitting its lowly condition : " Bread, and correction, and work for a slave."\*

The body, indeed, must be nourished, but with common food—"bread for a slave." If it rebels, it must be beaten with rods—"correction for a slave." In fine, see that it grows not sluggish with idleness—"work for a slave." But it may be that, from your earliest youth, you have brought up your servant in too dainty a manner and you now discover that he has grown insolent. If this is so, bear in mind, on that very account, that the obligation which rests on you of at last bringing him to a sense of his true position, is all the more weighty and imperative.

2. In the course of the Religious Life we have to endure

\* *Ecclus.* xxxii. 25.



many things burthensome and distasteful to the body; such are watching, fasting, abstinence, cold, continual labour, fatigue, and similar inconveniences. In order manfully to bear all these, bring with you a firm, fixed resolve. If hitherto you have passed your days amid the pleasures which flatter the flesh, think of that which is written in the Book of the Apocalypse: "As much as she hath glorified herself and lived in delicacies, so much torment and sorrow give ye to her."\* Consider all that Christ the Son of the Eternal Father, suffered for your sake, in His most holy body; reflect on all the torments, the crosses, and the afflictions that the Saints went through, in order to win the palm of victory; pass in review all the hardships and the troubles that men of the world will readily bear, in order to obtain a little glory, a few acres of land, and even objects more worthless still, while you—to your shame be it said—will not do far less to obtain the kingdom of heaven. "No one," says St. Gregory, "can attain to great rewards, except through great labours."† Imitate those Saints who made a sort of compact with themselves, not to give to their bodies any rest during this mortal life, in order that, after the great resurrection, they might be able to rejoice in perpetual peace and to abound with delights. This is the second disposition requisite on the part of the body.

3. The third consists in forcing the body, not only to undergo all the labours and to bear all the annoyances that, in consequence of regular observance, fall to its lot, but oftentimes to hinder it from enjoying even those pleasures which are in themselves lawful. This it may do by frequently performing some slight acts of self-denial—in seeing, in hearing, in tasting, in smelling, in touching, and in speaking. This right ordering of the outward man, which cannot be effected save by oft-repeated acts of self-denial, is the first work that must be undertaken by beginners. If it be neglected, they will not, without great difficulty, attain to interior things, and probably they will never attain to them.

You have now a clear idea of the preparation necessary,

\* *Apoc.* xviii. 7.

† *Hom.* xxxvii. in *Lucam.*

both on the part of the soul and on the part of the body, for making a good entry upon the service of God in the Religious State. All that now remains to be done is that you should carry out in act all that you have learned. In the following meditation, you will hear our holy Father's instructions concerning the manner in which you are to conduct yourself during the course of your Novitiate.

## FOURTH DAY

### MEDITATION I.

#### THE BENEFIT OF A RELIGIOUS VOCATION.

I. REFLECT on the benefit of a Religious Vocation, and consider that benefit with respect to those dangers from which a Religious Vocation sets you free. If you think but for a few moments on the character of the world, and on its unutterable wickedness, the magnitude of the favour which God has bestowed on you, in snatching you from the world's seething whirlpool, will begin to unfold itself before your mind.

The world is an abyss of darkness so dense that, its votaries are not able to see themselves, or the foul garbage on which they feed, or the abominations of the place in which they dwell, or the horrors of that to which they are hastening: "They know not, neither have they understood; they walk in darkness." Hence they think that they are wise, whereas they are fools; they think that they are something, whereas they are nothing; they call good *evil*, and evil *good*.

The world is false and deceitful. Truth is not found in it. Outwardly it is all gold; within it is all clay. It is like a dung-hill covered with snow. It is like a sepulchre, all beautiful without, but within full of rottenness and corruption. Behold how deceitful is the world which devours even those who love it, according to that saying of St. Augustine: "Thou lovest the world, and it will swallow thee." Its wealth is deceitful; its favour is deceitful; its power and glory are deceitful, as may be proved by the testimony of numberless witnesses and by examples occurring every day.



The life of the world is very laborious: "We wearied ourselves in the way of iniquity and destruction, and we have walked through hard ways."\* Pass in review all its darling pursuits, and you will find that the vices which cluster round them are but so many insatiable vultures, preying on the vitals of the soul.

The world is full of dangers. Who can enumerate them, whether they are considered as threatening the life of the body, or the far more precious life of the soul? Having revolved in your mind these and similar thoughts, exalt and praise the goodness and the mercy of God Who has drawn you out of darkness into His marvellous light; out of a prison full of deceit, oppression, toil, and danger, into an abode of truth, peace, rest, and security. Therefore, rejoice as they did, who in the Ark were saved from the waters of the Deluge; as Lot rejoiced, when snatched from the flames of Sodom; as the Israelites rejoiced, when they escaped from the slavery of Pharaoh and from the wrath of his army; as the three Children rejoiced, when protected from all harm even in the midst of the Babylonian furnace.

2. Consider the magnitude of these benefits, viewed with respect to the advantages enjoyed by a Religious in the life which he has embraced.

The first of these is that, from the fact of being called to Religious Life, he has great reason to hope that he is among the number of the predestined: "O happy Religious Life," exclaims St. Bernard;† "O blessed life, angelic life! In very truth Religious Life is a paradise. This is no other than the house of God. It is the gate of heaven. O most beautiful gate! through which we enter the kingdom of heaven; by which the reward of heaven is carried away and possessed; by which we obtain the patrimony of our eternal inheritance!"

The second is the "hundredfold" given to him in this life, when, instead of one father, of one mother, of a few brothers, of a home, of external, temporal, earthly possessions, he receives as many fathers and brothers as there are members

\* *Wisd.* v. 7.

† *Sermo de Margar.*

of the Order, who will love and stand by him with a more sterling show of affection than would those whom he has left for God's sake. He receives, moreover, a commodious dwelling-place; he is well provided with food, raiment, and all internal spiritual blessings. In return for the nothingness of the world, he obtains his God, and with Him all other things besides.

The third is that he is furnished with every opportunity of entirely giving himself up to God and to the care of his own salvation, provided that he does not attempt to busy himself about matters which do not concern him.

The fourth is that he has a share in all the good that is done by the whole Order, by the Monastery in which he lives, and by so many thousands of Saints in heaven and on earth.

The fifth is that he has at his disposal every means for advancing in perfection, such as holy books, religious exercises, the frequent use of the Sacraments, the right distribution of his time, the good example of his Brethren, a Rule which leads most directly to heaven, the guidance and the advice of Superiors and of those who love him as their brother and ungrudgingly share with him their own goods.

The sixth is that he has the opportunity of amassing an incalculable store of merits, growing out of the virtue of obedience, if only he will observe the Rule, follow the method of Monastic Life and accept the advice of his elders; all which practices, from their very perfection, are deserving of the highest esteem.

St. Bernard thus sums up the advantages of Religious Life: "In Holy Religion, a man lives more purely; falls more rarely; rises more speedily; advances more cautiously; he is more frequently bedewed with heavenly grace; he rests more securely; dies more confidently; he is cleansed more speedily; is rewarded more abundantly."\* Weigh well each of these advantages, and turning to God, give thanks for so singular a benefit. Firmly purpose to lead such a life

\* *Sermo de quaer. : bona marg.*

in Holy Religion as will effectually guard you against ever despoiling yourself of these inestimable favours.

Reflect on the horrible nature of the evil which a Religious commits, who, after so many and so signal graces received from God, still persists in being God's enemy, and thereby, of his own free will, deprives himself of so great a mass of spiritual wealth. That you may never incur so enormous a loss, flee from every deliberate sin as you would flee from the face of a serpent; detest all lukewarmness; strive to comprehend with your intelligence, to embrace with your will, and to carry out in act, all that will further the end for which you enter Religion and all that will prove useful in aiding you to accomplish your purpose. Then earnestly beseech God Who has inspired you with the will to do this, to give you the grace to effect that which He has inspired.

## MEDITATION II.

### THE END OF THE RELIGIOUS VOCATION IN GENERAL.

I. He whom God calls to the Religious State does not fully respond to so gracious an invitation by the mere fact of entering one of the Orders approved of by the Church. To do that is to pay but a very small portion of the debt of gratitude which he incurs in consequence of having been the object of so marked an expression of God's favour. The great bulk of that debt consists, after taking this first step, in fixing the eye of his soul on the purpose for which he has embraced Religious Life; then in following out that purpose with unswerving tenacity of will, by keeping ever present before his mind the end for which Almighty God has established Religious Orders in His Church. This end, as those who have written on the subject tell us, is none other than the attainment of Christian perfection. To discover and to gain possession of this precious pearl, all things else must be abandoned. For, it is that hidden treasure in comparison with which the wealth of the world must be considered as of little value. Therefore, fix the eye



of your mind on perfection as the prize that is set before you, and make a strong resolve with the help of God's grace to win it for yourself, even at the cost of all the wealth, of all the pleasures, and of all the honours of the world.

2. Religious perfection, as Castaniza observes, does not consist in a notable degree of science and of learning; or in eloquence, or in deeds which, in the eyes of men, are considered to be great and wonderful; it does not consist in apparitions, visions, illuminations and in other divine favours; in heroic works of moral virtue; in austerity of life, such as extraordinary bodily mortifications, the use of hair-shirts, of fasting and of watching; in spiritual sweetnesses and in pious and fervent affections; in a multiplicity of daily prayers, in assiduous attendance in Choir, in the observance of silence prescribed by Rule, in solitude of life, in the discipline of a reformed Rule and in other external practices of a similar nature. These are but so many means to gain perfection, some of which means are more necessary for that purpose than others; among which more necessary means we may count self-denial, the practice of virtues, and of patience under trials. Although the other less necessary means are the earthly rewards of perfection and the signs by which we may judge of its presence in the soul, yet they all may be found in one who is absolutely void of any Christian perfection whatever. In order, therefore, that you may secure for yourself the possession of true perfection, give special heed to the following counsels:

First, let not your chief aim, during your Novitiate and during the time of your Religious Life, be to exercise yourself in one, or in even many of the laudable practices just enumerated, but to use them with the advice of your Spiritual Father, as means to obtain real, solid perfection.

Secondly, be not overwhelmed with sadness, or troubled in mind, if you have not so quick an intelligence and possess not so much learning and facility of speech as you would wish; if you have not strength of body to endure extraordinary mortification; if you do not experience those spiritual consolations and those tender affections with which

some persons are favoured ; if you cannot apply to those manifold prayers and to those deep meditations in which they are able to exercise themselves. Be not down-hearted, as if, by not being able to do these things, you were incapacitated for obtaining the end of your vocation ; for, that end does not consist in any of them.

Thirdly, take not any vain complacency in yourself; esteem not yourself to be better than others, no matter how excellent your natural ability, your learning, and your talent may be, since these advantages are held in but scant esteem by God Who did not take them away from His greatest enemies, the devils, to whom you are far inferior in all such gifts. Do not flatter yourself, be not puffed up with pride, if you practise austerities, if you are favoured with spiritual consolations, if you give yourself up to long prayers, because practices of piety such as these, are found in men who are imperfect, who are slaves to their passions and enemies of God.

Fourthly, especially beware of giving way to sadness, to murmuring, or to disquiet, if by the fatherly providence of God, either directly through His action, or indirectly through the action of Superiors, you are hindered from employing either one or many of the afore-mentioned means of which you desire to make use, such, for instance, as either learning or eloquence ; or if through sickness or through obedience you are taken away from those pious exercises which you were accustomed to perform with great pleasure and peace of soul. This is a matter of no small moment. Therefore, deeply reflect on it, and, with most ardent affection, turning to God, make such resolves both in this respect and in respect to those other matters proposed in this consideration, as will be a source of consolation to you now and for all eternity.

3. Consider in what essentially consists that religious perfection which we have said is the end of your vocation. It consists in the love of God, as the Holy Spirit teaches : "The end of the commandment is charity."\* "But above all these things have charity, which is the bond of per-

\* 1 *Tim.* i. 5.

fection.”\* “Love, therefore, is the fulfilling of the law.”† This charity, however, in order to be perfect, must be similar to a firmly rooted and fruitful tree; for, charity which is not deeply rooted either quickly withers or it is prostrated by every wind of temptation; and a charity which does not bear fruit cannot be pleasing to God. The roots of charity during this present life are faith and hope. Without these, charity cannot stand firm; for, the Apostle says: “Now there remain faith, hope, and charity, these three—but the greatest of these is charity.”‡ Its fruits are the acts of the other moral virtues which spring up and flourish because of the presence of charity in the soul. If the soul has not these, it is like to that tree spoken of in the Gospel, which tree bore leaves only. It is threatened with the curse of God. By faith and by hope charity is kept in full vigour and is able to resist all the attacks of the devil, the world, and the flesh which aim at its destruction; for, no temptation, no adversity, no snare, is able to prevail against a strong faith and a firm trust in God. The pages of Holy Writ are full of proofs which establish this truth: “By faith the Saints conquered kingdoms, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, became valiant in battle; others were racked, not accepting deliverance, that they might find a better resurrection.”§ Besides the exceeding glory which the Sacred Writings give to charity, they point out to us the acts of other virtues, each in its own kind as belonging to charity; so that there is not any species of perfection that charity does not possess in order to enable us to live worthily in this state of life. You are not bound actually to be perfect, but only to tend to perfection, as every Christian is bound to tend to it, by the means afforded by his state of life, and also as a future Religious, by employing those means which you find ready to your hand in your present calling. What progress have you made thus far? Till the day of your death you must not desist from tending

\* *Coloss.* iii. 14.

† *Rom.* xiii. 10.

‡ *1 Cor.* viii. 13.

§ *Heb.* xi. 32, 35.



towards this perfection. Let not any difficulty hinder you from entering upon, and from treading in its ways. These ways the evil spirits beset like robbers; the world with its deceits will go forth to meet you; the flesh will prove refractory. But nevertheless, do you be courageous. Take unto yourself the impenetrable shield of faith and of steadfast trust in God, and the more you distrust yourself the greater let your confidence be in God, committing yourself wholly to His guidance. Be not downcast if you advance slowly; but, with humble and long-suffering patience, bear with your own imperfections. Provided that you desist not from making serious efforts to advance, you will most assuredly experience the marvellous forethought and the secret direction of Our good God in your behalf.

### MEDITATION III.

THE END OF YOUR VOCATION TO THE BENEDICTINE ORDER IN PARTICULAR—THE MEANS, GENERAL AS WELL AS PARTICULAR, WHICH ARE TO BE USED BY THOSE WHO ARE CALLED TO THIS ORDER.

1. Besides the general end which, as we saw in the preceding meditation, is perfection, each Religious Body has some particular purpose for which it was instituted. This purpose may be called its proximate end; and, if viewed with respect to its ultimate and to its mediate end, may be considered as the principal means by which it accomplishes its purpose. Some Religious Orders have poverty for their proximate end; others, silence; others, mortification of the flesh; others, the preaching of the Word of God. The Benedictine Order, however, puts before those who make profession of its Rule, the acts of the contemplative life as its primary proximate end. These acts are all those that immediately tend to the sanctification and the salvation of their own souls. Nevertheless, its secondary and less principal end,—which is not, however, an accidental end, but one which is its own from its very institution,—are the works of the active life, directed to the perfecting and the saving of

souls, but so ordered that the active is always subordinate to the contemplative life. Moreover, this active life is never taken up by any one of its members, except at the command of Superiors, and in that measure and in that degree which it may seem good to these Superiors to appoint. Therefore, if you wish to be a true Benedictine, give yourself up primarily and wholly to your own advancement in sanctity, and, with all possible earnestness and striving, work out your own salvation, leaving everything else to the will and the disposal of your Superiors. Consequently, you may gather from this, that he whose *chief* aim is to labour for his neighbour, has quite missed the purpose of the Benedictine Order; for, it may happen that during the whole course of his life he may never be intrusted with any such charge. Examine, therefore, into the motives by which you are swayed.

2. The Benedictine Order, in a most special manner, places before its members, as means for the acquisition of personal perfection, true obedience and humility, which are features so characteristic of its spirituality, that, in a certain sense, the attainment of them may be regarded as its end; and he who fails to acquire them cannot, with truth, be called a Benedictine. A man may be a Benedictine without great corporal austerity, without external solitude, without any other heroic actions; but, without obedience and humility, he can no more be a true Benedictine than there can be a sun without light, or a fire without heat. Therefore it is that our holy Father and Legislator, in the beginning of the Prologue to his Rule, informs those who come to him that they must learn to be obedient: "Hearken, my son, and effectually accomplish the admonitions of thy loving Father, that by the labour of obedience thou mayest return to Him from Whom thou didst depart by the sloth of disobedience. Therefore, are my words now addressed to thee, who, renouncing thy own will, dost take upon thee the strong and bright arms of obedience, to fight under the Lord Christ, our true King." Again; as the same holy Father, in the fifth chapter of the Rule, says that obedience cannot exist without humility—of which fact experience gives us most

practical proofs—deservedly is humility joined with obedience, and in these two virtues the spirit and the end of the Order are said to consist. As special meditations will be given farther on concerning these two fundamental virtues which our holy Lawgiver considers to be essential for a good Novice, in order to lay down a solid basis, do you, in the meantime, examine with what affection you are drawn towards these virtues, and be assured that your advancement in Holy Religion will be in exact proportion to your advancement in obedience and in humility.

3. Before proceeding to consider the particular means which are most suitable for rightly beginning your Novitiate and for bringing it to a successful issue, you must first learn the general means employed by every Religious Body, and then the particular means employed by the Benedictine Order, by which means each strives to gain its end, or, in other words, to win religious perfection. The first general means are the vows—poverty, chastity, and obedience. The second is the Rule itself, written under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The third are stability and amendment of manners. The fourth are the Constitutions, ceremonies, laudable customs, admonitions, instructions of the Order, of the Monastery, of Superiors, of our Spiritual Fathers. The fifth, which is implicitly contained in the fourth, but is nevertheless worthy of special attention, is the frequent and devout use of the Sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist. From the consideration of these various means, gather the following precepts for your own special benefit.

(1) Although while a Novice you are not bound by the vows of Religion, nevertheless you would act very foolishly if you resolved to practise the virtues which are promised to God by the vows, only *after*, and not *before* you have made those vows; but, in the meantime, while you are still free, you determined to be unduly attached to worldly things, to indulge in self-gratification, or at least in that self-gratification which is not gravely sinful, or which is not contrary to chastity—and this even persons who live in the world are bound to do—and to give yourself free scope to commit



other faults of a similar character. To act in this way would, we repeat, be foolish; for, it would expose you to the danger of falling away even after your profession, in consequence of the evil habits which you would contract. For, it is ordained that the year of probation should go before Religious Profession, not only that you may acquire a speculative knowledge of all that you will afterwards have to do for the rest of your life, but also that you may acquire good habits and may test by actual experiment whether you are able to bear the yoke which will be laid on your shoulders by the obligation of the vows.

(2) Conceive a very high esteem of the Holy Rule, both because its primary Author is the Holy Spirit—St. Benedict, filled with the spirit of all the Just, being but its secondary author—and because it is the law under which you wish to serve and for which you one day will have to render an account. Also, because it is the most direct way of going to God.

(3) To facilitate the acquisition of that stability which will repress the spirit of curiosity and pride, be charitable, meek, humble, complaisant and patient towards all, and from your inmost soul look on yourself as inferior to everyone else.

(4) Observe with the utmost exactitude both the public and the private regulations of Superiors, not through motives of human respect or through fear of any one, but through a supernatural love of religious perfection.

(5) Finally, be most carefully on your guard against ever suffering the frequent use of the Sacraments to degenerate into mere routine which is so detrimental to perfection and is so grave a hindrance to all advance in the ways of God, that in our limited space it is impossible adequately to describe it. Therefore, resolve to act in such a manner as will be fitting in one who is vested with so great a dignity.

## FIFTH DAY

### MEDITATION I.

THE FIRST REQUISITE IN A GOOD NOVICE, "THAT HE SHOULD TRULY SEEK GOD."

I. THE great St. Bernard tells us what it is "truly to seek God," when he says: "It is, to seek for nothing else as we seek for Him; it is to seek for nothing else besides Him; it is to seek for nothing else after Him; it is to seek for nothing in preference to Him or with Him; and it is not to turn away from Him to any created thing whatever."\* A Benedictine monk thus describes a Novice who truly seeks God: "He truly seeks God, who, in his secret life, does not aim at anything else; who neglects himself in all things; who altogether abandons his self-will and attends entirely to the well-being of his soul. It is, in very truth, a terrible calamity that men should be led to the Religious Life, by the devil and by the flesh; that they should live in the Monastery as if they had come to live for themselves; and that, having come to seek God, they should find only themselves, and, by finding themselves during the years of fleeting time, should lose themselves for all eternity."† Of which number are you? With what intention have you entered the Monastery? In what way do you purpose to live during the time of your Novitiate and after it has come to a close? Confess the matter as it really is, and deceive not yourself; God searcheth the reins and the heart, and there is naught that can be hidden from Him. Do you truly seek God and your own salvation in this Order? Have you been lured hither by any human respect, or by any worldly

\* *Sermo xxxvii. de Divers.*

† Gerardus Belgicus.

consideration? If the search for God has led you hither, exult, rejoice, and praise God, because He has dealt mercifully with you; and be assured that you will find Him when in truth you seek Him. But if human respect and worldly considerations have influenced you, go not one step farther, until you have generously and with all your soul detested these evil motives, ejected them from your soul, and for ever cast them behind your back. Protest, with all the earnestness of which you are capable, that you wish to enter Religion for no other purpose than to love God and to save your soul. If you cannot with your whole heart determine to do this, lay the matter before your Spiritual Father, and take counsel with him concerning it; but if you will not do this, one of these two things will happen: either you will not persevere in the career upon which you have entered, or you will live in it a most wretched life.

2. Consider how important it is that each should be led to enter Religious Life, by a right and sincere intention of seeking God. "If once the heart be corrupted in its intention, the action which follows will be securely held by the wily enemy; for, he sees that the whole tree will bear fruit for him, the root of which he shall have pierced with his venomous tooth."\* We must use the utmost vigilance, lest while occupying ourselves with good works, our minds be stained with a perverse intention.† Have you never seen a plant or a tree, the root of which is dead? Although the plant or the tree remains green and flourishes for a short time, yet it presently withers and dies. So it is also with one who enters Religious Life and remains in it without a good intention. Our intention is like a root, which, when it has decayed, speedily infects the rest of the tree—that is to say, our life and our morals; and though the tree may at first exhibit some signs of life and may give forth a good odour, yet, after a short time, it will be uprooted and cast forth from the garden of Religious Life—"I passed by, and lo, it was not!"‡—or, if it be suffered to remain, because its root or evil intention, is not changed,

\* S. Greg., *Moralia*, lib. i.

† *Ibid.*

‡ Ps. xxxvi. 36.



and it has been concealed, not only it will not bear any fruit of virtue, but it will lose, through its own fault, the worth of its most excellent external growth or actions, and will become unto others an object of loathing. But to God, to the Founders of the Religious Order, and to others better than ourselves, we shall be hurtful, because we shall be occupying ground to which we have not any right and of which we are unworthy. Have a great dread of so wretched a state. Take your own affairs in hand. Turn yourself wholly to God, and, concerning your intention, take with Him those measures which will conduce to your eternal well-being.

3. As an evil intention is productive of very bad effects, so, on the contrary, a good intention of truly seeking God is productive of very good effects. Of these latter we will place before your mind's eye two, which we beg of you to examine with all care. The first of these is a wondrous repose and tranquillity of soul, even in the midst of adversity and contradiction. What was it that made the Spouse in the Canticles so self-possessed as not to betray any movement of indignation, though provoked by blows, wounds, and injuries? It was, without doubt, because she was intent on seeking her Beloved. This desire of finding Him, a desire wherewith her soul was animated, made her insensible to all else and incapable of being influenced thereby. A similar result happens in the case of those who, with a sincere desire of seeking and of finding God, enter Religious Life and persevere in their good dispositions; for, nothing can take away peace and repose of mind from him who is able to say: "I have entered Religion with no other intention than that of seeking my Beloved for Whose sake I am ready to endure hardships, injuries, and contradictions."

The second effect is perseverance. That which lures so many from Religious Life and from good undertakings, oftentimes is nothing else than the fact of never having seriously determined to seek only God and to adhere to Him, or of having been induced to enter Religion for some temporal motive. When they discover that they

neither are able, nor are permitted to have that for which they crave, they withdraw their hand from the plough and look back to the worldly life whence they came. But he who has determined truly to seek only God, possesses with that very resolve a great earnest of his perseverance; because Our good Lord flees not from those who seek Him. He willingly goes forth to meet them, and imparts strength to enable them to persevere and to resist whatever may oppose their steps, "for, they that seek the Lord shall not be deprived of any good."\* Therefore, if you wish to enjoy, in Religious Life, an uninterrupted peace and repose of mind, even in the midst of the trials which will not fail to test of what metal you are made; if you desire to persevere in it until death, daily advancing more and more in all good—make use of the means which in this meditation have been proposed to you; truly seek God with your whole heart; detest any other intention; and, if any such shall creep in, humbly ask pardon for it. Turning to your most loving God, offer yourself entirely to Him, as Christ offered Himself when He entered the world; when He was presented in the Temple; when He was immolated upon the Cross; offer yourself with a most pure intention, as our Blessed Lady, as St. Benedict, and as all the other Saints did. Most earnestly beseech Our good God to accept your offering; to be pleased with it; to help you by His grace and to give you strength to complete, by perseverance, that which you have begun for His glory.

## MEDITATION II.

### QUALITIES REQUISITE ON THE PART OF THOSE WHO SEEK THE LORD.

I. The first quality concerns the manner in which we seek God. This must be "with our whole heart." God Himself points out this to us when He says: "When thou shalt seek there the Lord thy God, thou shalt find Him; yet so if thou seek Him with all thy heart and all the affections of thy

\* Ps. xxxiii. 11.

soul.”\* “Why, O man!” asks St. Anselm, “dost thou wander about seeking the goods of soul and of body? Seek them by love, and in thy search, love the one Good in which are all good things, and it is enough. Desire the simple good which is all good, and it is enough.” What is more just than that with your whole heart, you should seek only Him, unto Whom, on so many titles, you owe yourself. You belong wholly to God, because He created you, and by preserving you in life, He continues the work of your creation. You belong to God in a far more excellent way than other creatures of the earth do, because of the more excellent manner of your creation; for, He fashioned you to His own likeness. You belong to Him not only on the title of creation, but on the title of redemption: “You are not your own; for, you are bought with a great price.”† Jesus Christ bought you at a price of infinite worth, a price which is none other than His labour, His sorrow, His blood, His suffering, His death, all which are worth more than you are. It follows from this that you are wholly God’s, because, on innumerable titles, you belong to Him. Therefore, turning to God with all the affection of your heart, cry out with St. Bernard: “If I owe my whole life to you for having made me, what shall I add for the fact of your having repaired me, and of having repaired me at so great a cost! By your first act, you gave me to myself; by your second, you gave yourself to me; and by giving yourself, you restored me to myself. Therefore, having been given and restored, I owe myself for myself and I owe myself upon a twofold title. What return shall I make to you, O God! for yourself? Even if it was possible for me to spend myself a thousand-fold, what am I compared with you, O my God?”‡ Determine, at least, to do that which it is in your power to do—namely, to spend your whole heart in seeking God and never more to divide it between Him and creatures. For having done this in the past, grieve with all the earnestness of your soul and most humbly ask pardon.

2. The second quality has reference to time; it is to

\* *Deut.* iv. 29.

† *1 Cor.* vi. 20.

‡ *Tract. de dilig. Deo.*



seek God from your first entrance into the Monastery, until the last moment of your life. Hence the Psalmist exhorts us "to seek His face always";\* and St. Augustine says: "While we are here, let us always seek; and let not the fruit of our finding be the end of our seeking. For, because He is to be sought only here, we do not, therefore, say that He is not to be sought always; but we say that He is always to be sought here, lest at any time we should think that we are to desist from searching for Him."† The words of St. Leo harmonise well with those of St. Augustine: "No one draws nigher to the knowledge of truth than the man who is intelligent in divine matters; yet, though he may have made great progress in this learning, there will always be something for him to seek after. For, he who imagines that he has already arrived at the goal towards which he is tending, does not find that after which he is seeking; he fails in the search."‡ Therefore, do not kindle the fire of your zeal for piety and for perfection, in order that it may burn for only the year of your Novitiate.

Do not feed yourself on the empty hope of one day having more liberty; but, bear in mind and be fully persuaded that the Religious State is one of *perpetual* violence to nature; and that the contest ceases not till the soul is separated from the body. This life is not the time for ease, but for labour. During the year of Novitiate, only the foundations of your spiritual life are laid; on these, your whole subsequent life till your last breath is built, and it should go on daily increasing in perfection. By your Religious Profession, by your priesthood, and by the various offices of trust which are given to you, you are burthened with a greater obligation of advancing in perfection. They are not so many reasons for obtaining greater freedom of action, or for claiming exemptions. Even until the hour of death, man is never allowed to give over his pursuit of perfection; and this conclusion holds good, in a very special way, of the Religious man. These are principles of the Religious Life, most necessary and most incontrovertible. They will meet and destroy all

\* Ps. civ. 4.

† *In loc. cit.*

‡ *Sermo ix. de Nativ.*

those hurtful opinions that are the roots whence very baneful fruit may spring. With what sentiments are you filled with respect to these principles? On these sentiments much will depend; for, a recently baked vessel long retains the odour of the liquor that is first poured into it.

3. The third quality is with fortitude and with undaunted mental courage to seek God: "Seek ye the Lord and be strengthened."\* Many are the opposing difficulties, many the bitter enemies that in the beginning confront those who are seeking God.

Unless you arm yourself with great fortitude of soul against these enemies, you will grow weary of fighting; from being weary, you will fall into languor; and from being languid, you will altogether give over the contest. "My son," says Ecclesiasticus, "when thou comest to the service of God, stand in justice and in fear, and prepare thy soul for temptation."† "Let all the rigour and the austerity," says our holy Father, "by which we tend towards God, be laid before the Novice."‡

St. Martin used to say that Jesus can nowhere be found except on the Cross. You see, then, how necessary it is for you to have fortitude and courage, if you would not give over your search for God. Therefore, prepare yourself for all that is rigorous and austere—that is to say, for many bodily inconveniences, for watchings, for opprobrious treatment and the like, for weariness, affliction, and desolations—and resolve, for the love of God, and in imitation of His despised and mortified Son Jesus, willingly and with generosity to endure all these heavy crosses, not to desist on account of their weight from seeking your Beloved, but rather to persevere, as did the faithful Spouse, during the night of tribulation, and in the midst of injuries and of wounds: "By night I sought Him Whom my soul loveth; the watchmen who kept the city found me, they struck me and wounded me, the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me."§ But, as a set-off against this, bear in mind that Our good

\* *Ps.* civ. 4.

† *Reg.*, cap. lxxviii.

‡ *Cap.* ii. 1.

§ *Cant.*, cap. iii. 1, 3, and cap. v. 7.

God will not suffer you to be tried beyond your strength; He will make also with the temptation issue that you may be able to bear it. We have His own word for this: "I am with him in tribulation, I will deliver him and I will glorify him."\* Again; "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a contrite heart, and He will save the humble of spirit."† Of this the Spouse had experience; for, she says of herself: "When I had a little passed by them, I found Him Whom my soul loveth; I held Him, and I will not let Him go."‡ You also will experience the like; therefore, enter with fortitude on your new state of life, and you will afterwards confess that you have been most amply repaid for all the labours that you have undergone, and for all the inconveniences and the afflictions that you have suffered.

### MEDITATION III.

#### THE HINDRANCES WHICH OPPOSE THOSE WHO ARE SEEKING GOD.

1. He who desires to win for himself anything that he holds in high esteem is careful to look forward and remove from his path any obstacle that may either delay or hinder him in the attainment of the object at which he aims. You are now, with all your heart, seeking God; therefore, make it your business to discover and to remove all those things that may hinder your search. With some men, the first hindrance is an immoderate love of parents and of relatives: "Jesus is not found among His kinsfolk and acquaintance." Affection for these has made very many give up the search for Him! How do you find yourself disposed in this respect? That affection makes a Religious liable to be disturbed by everything that pains and troubles his relatives, and therefore, it not unfrequently causes him to lose the repose and the peace for which, while living in the world, he longed so much. Moreover, it robs him of God Himself, Who is the Prince of peace. This love of relatives, when not strictly confined to its proper place, becomes for a Religious

\* Ps. xc. 15.

† Ps. xxxiii. 19.

‡ Cant. iii. 4.



a positive snare which so entangles him in the wretched cares of the world, that he is sometimes tripped up by them, and plunged headlong into a seething whirlpool of unrest. But even if these evils do not result from it, a love of relatives which exceeds the just limits of right reason, ought to be brought within due bounds ; for, otherwise either it retards the attainment of perfection, or, if a certain measure of perfection has already been acquired, it very considerably diminishes even that measure. Hence Our most loving Lord would not suffer the disciple first to bury his father and settle his worldly affairs, before obeying the call to follow Him, signifying thereby, as St. Jerome observes "that we ought to take off the keen edge of our love of kindred, in order to avoid the peril to which it exposes us."\* If you wish to escape the danger of altogether giving up searching for God with your whole heart, or of growing torpid and negligent in your search, generously renounce all these affections; choose God for your Father, Mary for your Mother, and cleave to them with all the affection of your heart.

2. A second hindrance which keeps us from seeking God, is an undue regard for other men's example which is present before our eyes, or which we have seen in the past, or of which we may, perhaps, have heard. The mighty influence which example exercises over the minds of men, and particularly over the minds of *young* men, and the power which it possesses of drawing them away from God, seem to be almost beyond the bounds of credibility. Therefore, strongly fortify yourself against this power and this influence, and resolve, by the following means, to remove the obstacles which they put in your way :

(1) Implant in your mind this firm resolve: "I will live in this Order in every respect holily, perfectly, and according to the Rule of the Institute which in a few days I shall embrace. I will observe all the ordinances that I know are prescribed, even though there be in the Monastery no one else that observes them ; yea, even though there shall never be any one else that will observe them. For, I have come

\* *Epist. cxxviii. ad Fabianum.*

to Religious Life, not to live either as others are living or as they shall live, but as all must live that desire to follow the spirit of the Institute. Therefore, I will not fashion my life on the conduct of others, but on the rules which at my entrance are given me to read. These I will follow as the maxims which I have to take for my guides and as the square of all my actions. From this moment till the end of my life I will adhere to this purpose."

(2) Never excuse your defects and imperfections by appealing to the evil example of others; for, by so doing, you will co-operate with them in loosening the bonds of religious discipline and in augmenting the number of the lukewarm.

(3) Fix your eyes on the example of Christ and of His Saints, but especially on the example which those Saints of your own Order have given, because they were perfect men. Put more trust in the lessons and the teaching of your Spiritual Father than you put in anything that may be taught in the opposite sense, because it is by his instrumentality that God has decreed to promote your eternal well-being.

(4) Do not, however, constitute yourself judge of those whom you may see acting contrariwise, but imagine that what Christ said to St. Peter is addressed to you also: "What is that to thee? Do thou follow Me." It is your duty to make much of them, but not to imitate them.

3. The third and worst hindrance are vicious habits, untamed passions, a licentious life, and bodily senses that are not under control. Therefore, leave no stone unturned, and with careful scrutiny examine whether there may not, perchance, be still lurking in your soul some misdeed of the past. Drag it from its hiding-place and cast it forth as speedily as possible; for, if you love the danger, you will perish in it; you will never attain to the possession of God. If, then, you perceive that you are entangled in the meshes of any bad habit, weigh well the gravity of the evil and danger in which you are living; then, with implacable hatred, attack the vice that has made you captive; be most

heartily sorry for it and detest the foul deeds from which it springs. Never again be guilty of it, but earnestly apply yourself to the exercise of acts of the opposite virtue. In order that you may duly put in practice these various counsels of piety, knock at the door of divine mercy by most fervent prayer; be frank and outspoken with your Spiritual Father and follow his counsel and advice. With respect to bridling your untamed passions, concerning which important duty a more minute instruction will be given to you in its proper time and place, you may note and observe this one piece of advice: "Love the one, true good." To do this, is in conformity with right reason which helps a man and pushes him forward towards virtue, repose of mind and conscience, his last end, salvation, and God. On the other hand, attack with relentless hatred that which is really evil—namely, any sin whatever and every imperfection; then your salvation is secure, and there will not be any way left open for the entrance of the passions. Finally, setting aside all principles and maxims that sanction a looser method of life, hold in very high esteem the careful guarding of the senses. In order to carry into effect these various counsels, stir up your soul by all those reasons by which you think that it will be moved; and when you offend in any respect, impose some penance on yourself. Deplore your past errors, and humbly ask pardon and grace.



## SIXTH DAY

### MEDITATION I.

THE SECOND CONDITION REQUISITE IN A GOOD NOVICE, TO WIT, THAT HE SHOULD BE EAGER OR SOLICITOUS FOR THE "WORK OF GOD."

1. BY the "Work of God," our holy Lawgiver means the Divine Office, or, according to some interpreters, psalmody ; but the Abbot Smaragdus and others take it in a wider sense. Writing on this passage of the Rule, Smaragdus says : " The ' Work of God ' signifies all those duties that properly pertain to God, such as prayer, holy reading, the night-watches,\* the daily round of service, fasting, and the ' Divine Office.' " It is about these that our holy Father so earnestly wishes the Novice to be *solicitous*.

They are the chief occupations on which a Benedictine Religious ought to be intent ; for, they are most in conformity with the principal end of the Order—namely, the contemplative life. Under this head come both vocal and mental prayer. This latter is made by means of various considerations, either interspersed with, or followed by, fervent aspirations. Also, we may regard as pertaining to the " Work of God," recollection of mind, examination of conscience, hearing Mass, the use of the Sacraments, spiritual conferences, and, in fine, everything that is directed to God's honour and worship. Opportunities for the exercise of all these are found in abundance in this Order. It will be to your advantage seriously to resolve to make a good use of them.

2. What is meant by " being *solicitous* for the Work of God "? Our blessed Lord forbade us to be solicitous about

\* *Vigiliæ*—Matins.

earthly matters : " Be not solicitous, saying : What shall we eat, or what shall we drink."\* But in matters which pertain to the honour of God, solicitude is most praiseworthy. Hence, in this respect, God, by the mouth of the Prophet Micheas, instructs each of us : " I will show thee, O man ! what is good and what the Lord requireth of thee : verily to do judgment and to love mercy, and to walk *solicitous* with thy God."† He, therefore, is solicitous for the " Work of God," and he deserves to be so called :

(1) Who prefers nothing whatever to the " Work of God," as St. Benedict requires that his children should do.‡

(2) Who carefully looks forward, arranges, and makes everything ready for that heavenly occupation, in accordance with that precept of Ecclesiasticus : " Before prayer, prepare thy soul ; and be not as a man that tempteth God,"§ and with the injunctions which are to be found in the ninth and tenth chapters of the Holy Rule.

(3) Who is quick in coming to Matins and to the various " Hours " of the day Office ; who, as soon as he has heard the signal, laying aside every occupation in which he may happen to be engaged, hastens to the Oratory with all speed and yet with gravity, lest he should give occasion for light behaviour. ||

(4) Who, after due preparation, assists at the Divine Office with the greatest reverence, humility, modesty, attention, and devotion ; who, in the worship of God, is careful not to sin even venially ; ¶ for, St. John Chrysostom says : " We ought to have more care of the divine worship than we have of our own lives : " \*\* that is to say, we ought to be ready to lose our life rather than be guilty of any deliberate sin in the worship of God.

(5) Who accurately observes all the times prescribed for the spiritual exercises, and who never through his own fault or through negligence, either omits any of them or changes them.

\* *St. Matth.* vi. 25.

§ *Ibid.*, cap. xviii. 23.

† *Mich.* vi. 8.

|| *Ibid.*, cap. xliii.  
\*\* *De Incomp. Dei*

‡ *Reg.*, cap. xliii.

¶ *Cap.* xix. 20.

(6) Who gladly speaks of God and of spiritual things. In fine, who performs all his duties, not on compulsion, or against his will, or through human motives, but freely and with a burning desire of pleasing God. Act in this way during the course of your Novitiate and for the rest of your life, and, in consequence of having fulfilled this condition, you may be quite at ease about the realisation of your fondest hopes. Nevertheless, forget not to beseech Our good God to supply, by the aid of His grace, that which weak human nature is unable to effect.

3. Consider what are the means and the various practices which are necessary for the exact fulfilment of this condition. The first is a great esteem for those occupations which have immediate reference to the Divine Office. What a privilege does the courtier esteem it to be when he is admitted to the familiar converse and service of his Prince! Shall you, then, consider it a matter of little moment to be able to address, to serve, and to be occupied about the business of Him, "Whom to serve is to be a king?"

The second is a careful guarding of the tongue and of the external senses. It was a saying of St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi, that the "tongue of a Religious who is not delighted with silence is incapable of savouring divine things." Also, St. Bernard says: "The tongue being thin and flat is a most excellent implement for emptying the heart—as the consciences of many among us will bear me witness—unless, indeed, we are all so perfect that, after long conversations, our minds are never found empty, our meditations less devout, our affections dried up, and our holocausts of prayer less fat, by reason of the words which we either have spoken or have heard."\* Therefore, it is not without good reason that our holy Lawgiver, in the fourth chapter of the Rule, immediately before the fifty-sixth, fifty-seventh, and fifty-eighth instruments of good works—by which he commends to our practice holy reading and prayer—places four other instruments which are designed for the proper management of the tongue. How great a hindrance

\* St. Bernard, *Sermo* xvii. *de Diver.*



to the attainment of this condition is put in our way by any want of custody of the senses is manifest to all; for, this deficiency gives an occasion for a multitude of images to crowd into the mind; it causes the mind to become soft and renders it sensual in its nature, "and the sensual or carnal man," as St. Paul says, "perceiveth not those things which are of the Spirit of God; for, it is foolishness to him, and he cannot understand."\*

The third is a quiet, tranquil mind, free from inordinate affections. No one can freely draw nigh to God, if he is still fastened to the earth by badly regulated affections. On this subject listen to what Father Alvarez has to say: "By too great affection for creatures, the heart is made captive and deprived of that liberty and of that nobility with which God endowed it when He created man. It becomes incapable of and unfit for familiar converse with Our Lord God. Therefore, cut yourself loose from all these affections; descend to particulars; mark that which has heretofore chiefly delayed you from fleeing to God and resolve to cast it out of your heart. In the next place, weigh well the necessity for acquiring this tranquillity of mind in order rightly to fulfil this condition; for, it is impossible for a mind that is not at rest properly to perform these actions which are the works of the Spirit of peace. Therefore, in order always to keep your mind in peace, take these words to heart: "In all matters that do not depend on your own will and that are not in your power, commit yourself entirely to the hands of Divine Providence which most justly, most wisely, and most holily ordains all things. In other matters, however, after having made a prudent and honest use of human means, be so resigned in mind that, whether the issue answers your expectation or it does not, you will be certain that it is all the work of Divine Providence. Oh, how great peace of mind will you enjoy if you perfectly observe this rule! With how great gladness and exultation will you serve the Lord and enter His most holy presence!"

\* 1 Cor. ii. 14.

## MEDITATION II.

MOTIVES WHICH SHOULD URGE US TO CARRY INTO  
EFFECT THIS SECOND CONDITION.

1. The first motive that should urge a Novice and a Religious to an exact and careful performance of the "Work of God" is to be found in the very nature and the etymology of the word "Religious." For, it is derived from the word "religion," which signifies a virtue, chief among the moral virtues, the acts of which tend directly to the worship of the Deity; for, those who are devoted to the Religious State bind, consecrate, vow, and hand themselves over to the divine worship by acts of the virtue of religion, such as vows, prayer, devotion, adoration, the praise of God in Choir, sacrifice, and the rest. According to Lactantius,\* the word "*religion*" is derived from the Latin word "*religare*," which means to *bind*, because religion fastens and ties us down to the service of Almighty God. See, therefore, that you are not a Religious in name only, as you most certainly will be, if you be negligent, cold, and inattentive in the performance of whatever has reference to the divine worship and service, and if you look on these duties as among the last and least that claim your attention. Be determined wholly to consecrate yourself from this time till the latest moment of your life to the praise and the service of your Creator and literally to carry into effect the command of our holy Father: "Never to prefer anything to the Work of God," by endeavouring to the utmost of your power to be truly solicitous for that glorious duty.

2. A second motive is the great worth and dignity of the "Work of God." St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi used to say: "The dignity of praising God is so great that the heavenly Spirits, pure as they are, scarcely dare even with fear and trembling to perform it." "Oh unspeakable glory," cries out St. Jerome, "you are able, while yet in the frail

\* *Div. Instit.*, lib. iv., cap. 28.

tabernacle of the body, to look on the face of God! Here let our minds grow strong! Let this day utter speech unto day, and let night to night show knowledge. Here strive to be in the midst of the angelic choirs and in the company of the Saints that, on your liberation from the prison of the body, they may come with joy and gladness to meet you their friends who are already well known to them.”\* From these words of the holy Doctor you may gather that this occupation is one which is angelic and, therefore, most excellent. This he states in terms more precise when commenting on the one hundred-and-fifteenth Psalm, he says: “That which the Angels do in heaven is the Monk’s occupation on earth.” Happy will you be if, during your mortal life, you quit yourself well of this duty; of a certainty those blessed Spirits will meet you on your departure hence, that you may with them continue for all eternity that which you so gloriously began in this life.

3. The observance of this condition is one of the principal means of cherishing, preserving, and increasing the Religious Spirit; whereas the neglect of it brings on laxity and a total falling away from the first fervour that animated you. Give heedful note to that which men eminent for their learning and their sanctity have said on this subject: “As the building up within us of all virtues tends to the perfection of our prayer, so also all these same virtues, unless bound and held together by the crowning grace of prayer, cannot remain firm and stable for any length of time.”† “If,” says St. John of Jerusalem, “you wish to continue in the way of perfection, you must pray.”‡ “A servant of God,” says St. Bernard, “ought incessantly to read and to pray, in order to hinder evil from taking possession of his soul.”§ The same holy Father speaks very much to the point when he says: “When occupied on one occasion with manual labour, I began to think about the exercises of a spiritual man, and it occurred to me that there are in them four steps or degrees—namely, reading, meditation, prayer,

\* *In Reg. Monach.*, cap. xxvi.

† *Inst. Monach.*, cap. viii.

‡ Cassian, *Collat.* ix., cap. ii.

§ St. Bernard, *De Ordind. vita.*



and contemplation. This is that ladder by which Monks ascend to heaven.”\* With this view the opinion of Blossius is in accord. “If,” says he, “neglecting your interior, you care for only external things; if you do not diligently apply to holy reading and to other religious exercises, and only at rare intervals lift up your thoughts to eternal things, you are not a Monk.”† Also St. Bonaventure speaks most forcibly when he says: “Of a truth, that Religious who is not assiduous at prayer is wretched and useless. He bears about in a living body a soul which, in the eyes of God, is dead. Every Religious Congregation is imperfect, is barren—yea, is on the verge of destruction, if it seeks not the spirit of divine sweetness and directs not its chief aim to the pursuit of internal purity of heart.”‡ Again; “You must carefully withhold yourself from interrupting your pursuit of devotion; for, it is by devotion that all true Religious Life is preserved and that the practice of virtue is made rich and fruitful. Barren is every Religious Order that is not impregnated with devotion; tottering is the edifice of good works that is not held together by the frequent exercise of devout prayer; for, it is like a stone wall that has been built up without any mortar to hold it together. In every Religious Order in which the fervour of devotion has grown cold, every other implement for the acquisition of the virtues is found to be unequal to the task.”§ The miseries of such an Order are more specifically described by Jerome Savonarola who, after earnestly commending the attentive performance of the “Divine Work,” and especially of prayer, concludes thus: “Religious who reflect not on these things, who live without any consideration of their own end, become lukewarm, restless, murmurers, ambitious, wrathful, talkative, sensual; they are mere players and are harder to convert than men of the world. Unless God in His mercy calls them back to their first charity, they fall into other abysses whence they may never be drawn forth.” Do not these

\* *Scala Claustralis*. † *Spec. Monach.*

‡ *De Profectu Relig.*, lib. ii., cap. 69.

§ *De Profectu Relig.*, lib. vi., cap. 3.

words fill you with fear? Therefore, look well to yourself, lest at any time—an eventuality which may God prevent—you should fall into the depth of miseries so great and inflict so grievous a wound on Holy Religion which is your Mother. Make a most firm resolve to devote yourself to the exact fulfilment of this condition; and may God grant you grace to be faithful to your purpose!

### MEDITATION III.

EXAMPLES WHICH, IN THIS RESPECT, HAVE BEEN LEFT  
US BY CHRIST, THE SAINTS, AND THE PERFECT.

1. In the force of example there is a wondrous power of persuasion; hence the common saying: “Words move men; example hurries them along.” In order, therefore, more thoroughly to rouse yourself up to follow in the footsteps of your Lord, attentively consider the examples of solicitude for the “Work of God” which Jesus Christ has left behind Him for you to imitate.

We will here merely touch upon some few of these, leaving the rest to your own meditation.

(1) Christ came into the world, and in all that He suffered, did, and taught, He had never any other end in view, as He Himself tells us, than the glory of His Father: “I honour My Father; I seek not My own glory.”\*

(2) When, unknown to His parents, He remained in Jerusalem, and after three days He was found by them, His most holy Mother asked Him why He had done so to them? He answered: “Did ye not know that I must be about My Father’s business?”†

(3) Wearied with journeying, and seated by the well, His disciples requested Him to eat. He said to them: “I have meat to eat, of which you know not. My meat is to do the will of Him Who sent Me, that I may perfect His work.”‡

(4) This solicitude to accomplish the work of His Father

\* *St. John* viii. 49.    † *St. Luke* ii. 49.    ‡ *St. John* iv. 31, 34.

shone forth so manifest in Christ that, even His bitterest enemies could not deny it. Therefore, He openly reproached them for their unbelief; because, although they saw these works, yet they did not believe: "The works which the Father hath given Me to perfect, the works themselves which I do, give testimony of Me, that the Father hath sent Me."\* Again; "If I do not the works of My Father, believe Me not."†

(5) Praying to His Father, He says of Himself: "I have glorified Thee on the earth; I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do."‡ For this reason, shortly before His death, He cried out from the Cross; "It is finished;" that is to say, the work for which He came into the world. It would take too long to bring forward each instance, and especially to show how assiduous, reverent, humble, attentive, fervent, resigned, and constant was His prayer. Setting aside everything else, consider and contemplate Him before His Passion, praying in the Garden of Olives, and you will find in this act all the qualities of a good prayer. Turn, then, and look on the face of Christ; stir yourself up by His most holy example; resolve in all that you do and in all that you suffer, never to seek and never to be solicitous about anything else than the glory of God—that in all things God may be glorified.

Prefer nothing to the "Work of God," even though you may, in consequence, be obliged to suffer some inconvenience. Let men see that you are intent on this work and that you are engaged in carrying it into effect. Then, when you are about to die, you will be able to console yourself and to say with truth: "O God of my soul! I have finished the work which Thou didst give me to accomplish."

2. Fix your eyes on the example which the Saints of our Order have left to us, but particularly on that of our holy Father and Lawgiver, St. Benedict, who, in his Rule, in words of so great weight, recommends to us this solicitude about the "Work of God." Do you think that his actions did not correspond with his doctrine?

\* *St. John* v. 36.

† *Ibid.*, x. 37.

‡ *Ibid.*, xvii. 4.



St. Gregory says of him: "If any one desire to have a thorough knowledge of the life and the manners of St. Benedict, he will find it set forth in his Rule; for, the holy man could not act in a way which did not harmonise with his teaching."\* How great was the zeal of St. Maurus, his first disciple, in the cultivation of this species of solicitude, is manifest from the fact that St. Benedict admired him for it and often proposed him to his other followers as an example of regular observance and of all other virtues.

Thrice during the Divine Office the holy Bishop, St. Ludger, was told by the messengers of Charlemagne that the Emperor wished to speak with him. On each occasion he answered: "As soon as the Divine Office is finished, I will follow you to your Master." When it was over, he went to the Emperor. "Why," said the Monarch, "did you not come on the first summons?" "O King!" replied the Bishop, "I came not, because I deemed it fitting to prefer God unto thee and unto all created things. This thou didst command me when thou didst commit to me the pastoral charge. Therefore, when called by thy messengers, I considered it unbecoming to interrupt my service of Him." Weigh well these few words and learn to prefer the "Work of God" to every other work. This you will do, if you desire to be a true Benedictine and worthy imitator of those holy Fathers who have preceded you in the Religious Life.

3. Consider also the examples of the other Saints who directed all their zeal to the advancement of their souls in religious perfection.

St. Macarius, for the space of sixty years, was never negligent at prayer. Cassian relates that the first Monks were so solicitous about the study of heavenly things, that they applied themselves for whole days and nights to the reading of the Sacred Scripture, to prayer, and to manual labour.

So absorbed were they in these pursuits that neither the desire of food nor the memory of it interrupted their labour,

\* *Dialog.*, lib. ii.

except on every second or on every third day. Father Francis Suarez, of the Society of Jesus, used to say that he would willingly lose all the science that he had acquired by many years of labour, rather than omit one "Hour" of prayer. Endeavour to rival these brilliant examples of solicitude for the "Work of God," and firmly resolve for the future to comply to the utmost of your power with this second condition. In order that you may be able to do so, humbly ask the aid of God's grace.

## SEVENTH DAY

### MEDITATION I.

THE THIRD REQUISITE IN A GOOD NOVICE, THAT HE  
SHOULD BE EAGER FOR OBEDIENCE.

1. How fortunate is the wayfarer, who, in the midst of a trackless wilderness, meets with a trusty guide, under whose direction he reaches in safety his long-wished-for home! This is precisely what has happened to you; for, in the midst of the innumerable dangers of error wherewith you are surrounded, our holy Father St. Benedict presents himself before you and in eloquent words points out the sure way by which you may reach God and your true country. Therefore, attentively listen to the words which this wisest of fathers whispers in your ear: "Know, Brother, that by this path of obedience you shall go unto God."\* "Behold how the Lord, in His loving kindness, discovers unto you the way of life!" What more, then, have you to do than gladly to receive this admonition and instruction of your gentle Father, efficaciously to carry it out, and at once to enter this royal way by true and unreserved obedience?

2. But who is the obedient man, or who is he that really deserves to be called "a man eager for obedience"? It is he and only he that, with his whole heart, endeavours to throw into his obedience those qualities which, in the fifth chapter of his Rule, our holy Lawgiver prescribes. The first and essential quality of true obedience is to obey Superiors as we should obey God Himself. Mark well these words, because if this quality be wanting, you will never have

\* *Reg.*, lxxi.



that true obedience which our holy Father expects to find in his disciples, even though you should with the utmost promptitude carry into effect every wish of your Superiors and of your Brethren, fulfil every command to the very letter, and undertake duties most difficult to perform. St. Benedict does not look for a military or for a politic obedience, but for a religious and virtuous obedience. Such, without doubt, obedience never will be, unless it spring from a truly supernatural motive. Some men are *naturally* inclined to obey any one, even when obedience implies inconvenience to themselves; but these are not *virtuously* obedient, and, consequently, they easily fail altogether in this, their merely natural obedience, whenever the Superior, or the manner in which he gives his command, or the matter which he orders, happens to run counter to their humour. Of what nature is your inclination to obey? Let your chief care and solicitude be to have your obedience spring from a supernatural motive and to obey just as if the command had come straight from God.

The second essential quality is that in your obedience you should give up your will and judgment, "in order," as our holy Father says, "not to live according to your own will, or to follow your own desire and pleasures, but to abide in your Monastery, to will to have an Abbot over you and to walk according to his command and direction."\* For, to do that which is commanded is not enough; your obedience is worthless, if either your reason or your will murmurs and either judges or wishes that something should be done different from that which has been ordered.

The third quality is that obedience should be *speedy*, or, as St. Benedict says, that "it should know not any delay." He who delays, who waits for a second or a third order, who, if he cannot escape doing the work, yet finds out various excuses and pretexts for putting it off, is not by any means *eager* for obedience.

The fourth quality is that obedience should be *universal*—that is, that it should extend to all honest and lawful com-

\* *Reg.*, cap. v.

mands that are not contrary to the Rule; that it should be in conformity with the sixtieth instrument of good works: "To obey in all things the command of the Abbot"; and with the third degree of humility, "with all obedience to submit one's self to one's Superior," even when things that are impossible are prescribed."\*

The fifth quality is that obedience should be *joyous* and *ready*, "because God loveth a cheerful giver." A sad countenance, or a sad heart, takes away from obedience all goodness, both in the eyes of God and of men, and makes the commands which are given very burthensome.

Finally, obedience ought to be joined with humility and with patience, in order that, "if things that are hard, contrary, and injurious are commanded, we may embrace them with a quiet conscience, and in suffering them grow not weary or give over, since the Scripture saith: "He only that persevereth to the end shall be saved."† Let the impress of these qualities be deep in your mind, and, in order that you may have this supremely necessary virtue, in which, when it is coupled with humility, the spirit of the Benedictine Order consists, use every means in your power to interweave all these various qualities with your dutiful submission.

3. Reflect, now, on the means by which this virtue, together with its manifold qualities, is to be acquired. First, look on the Superior as holding the place of God Who has said: "He that heareth you, heareth Me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth Me." For, of a truth, Superiors are God's Vicars on earth, and as such, all reverence, love, and obedience must be shown to them, although they may be full of defects, and be difficult to live with; for, from characters of this kind "a greater reward is gotten," and we are counselled by St. Peter "to be subject to our Masters, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward."‡ This thought is of the greatest importance, and it must be pondered on with all care, especially in the beginning, in order that through it this good habit may be acquired.

Secondly, in small matters which are quite lawful, fre-

\* *Reg.*, cap. lxxviii.

† *Ibid.*, cap. vii.

‡ *St. Peter* ii. 18.

quently elicit acts of self-denial, saying: "My God, for love of Thee, I will not look at this object; I will not listen to these words; I will not make this remark"; for, by similar acts oft-repeated there is acquired a habit of mortification in matters which are of greater moment, and thus, that most implacable enemy, self-will which slays and condemns to eternal torments multitudes of souls, is killed little by little; for, as St. Bernard says: "Let self-will cease to exist, and there will be an end of hell."

Thirdly, in all things recognise the hand of Divine Providence; acknowledge His guidance in the arrangements which are made by Superiors; in these Superiors behold God carrying out His good pleasure through the instrumentality of men; and, in consequence of this, suffer yourself to be directed by them, just as children are by their parents. Diligently make use of these means and you will be prepared for the reception of that Benedictine spirit which, as we have already intimated, consists in true obedience and in humility.

## MEDITATION II.

### MOTIVES WHICH SHOULD INDUCE US TO ACQUIRE THIS THIRD REQUISITE.

I. In order deeply to implant in the heart a love of obedience and to cause that love to bud forth into a profusion of acts, our holy Father, in the fifth chapter of his Rule, suggests to his disciples four very powerful motives which, if suffered to take possession of the soul, cannot fail to cause the virtue of obedience there to fructify most luxuriantly. The first motive is love of Christ: "counting nothing more dear to them than Christ."\* The second is the obligation imposed by their State. The third is the fear of hell. The fourth is heavenly glory.

Of the first of these we will treat in the following meditation; at present, direct your thoughts to the last three, and

\* *Reg.*, cap. v.



gird yourself up to a constant study and a pursuit of obedience.

Therefore, in the first place attentively consider the *State* of life which you desire to embrace. This State requires you to be a *Regular*; to be detached; to be God's servant—that is to say, one who is a soldier, wayfarer, and zealous disciple.

But without true obedience you cannot pretend to have any of these characteristics. How can you be a *Regular* unless you are observant of *Rule*? How can you be detached, without renunciation of your will? How can you be a soldier, without obedience to your Leader; or a wayfarer, without a guide to point out to you the right path; or a student, without a Master to instruct you; or a servant, without a Lord, whom you must serve?

Do you wish to live conformably with the State which you have embraced? Be obedient. Although, during the Novitiate, you are not bound by the *vow* of obedience, yet, unless during that year of probation you wholly give up your will, you injure God, the holy Founders, and those who desire to live in true obedience, and whose place you are occupying. Not only you commit this act of injustice, but you expose yourself to the danger of breaking your solemn vow when at last you are burthened with its heavy obligation.

2. The second motive which incites men to be obedient, is the fear of hell. This fear is full of real power. Have you not left the world and come to Religious Life in order that you may escape the dread fire of that prison-house? What folly, then, would it be for you once again to expose yourself to the peril of falling into it? Self-will built up that abode of torture; therefore, unless you renounce self-will, you will ruin yourself. "It is self-will," says St. Bernard, "that has once again brought us back into the thralldom of darkness; it has once again made us subject to the empire of death; it will finally condemn our souls to hell."\* Our holy Father points out this dreadful end to those who will

\* *Sermo xi. de Divers.*

not obey, when he says: "Finally, death shall be inflicted as a just punishment on the disobedient sheep."\* Interpreters take this punishment to mean not only temporal, but eternal death which is called the second death. "It is certain," says Martène, explaining this passage, "that disobedient Monks merit for themselves both temporal and eternal death, because they despise God Himself when they condemn the Abbot and his teaching. Our Lord saith: 'He that despiseth you despiseth Me.'"<sup>†</sup> There is no lack of examples which would make manifest the fact that this dreadful punishment has been already inflicted on some Monks. Therefore, abhor self-will and disobedience as much as you abhor hell itself. Love and follow the guidance of obedience with as great an ardour as that is with which you desire to be saved from these eternal punishments. During this life willingly submit your neck to the sweet yoke of obedience; for, if you refuse to do this, there will be imposed on you at the end of your life an intolerable yoke which you will not be able to shake off.

3. The third motive for obedience is the contemplation of the glory of life eternal. O blessed country! who is there that, inflamed with the love and the desire of thee, would not most readily give up, for a short time, his judgment and his will, in order to possess in thee all that may be willed and desired! O happy obedience! which, by a secure and easy way, leads men to the kingdom of heaven! "Obedience," says St. John Climacus, "is a willing death, a secure danger, a ready excuse in the presence of God, a journey conducting to repose," of which the Psalmist says: "When He shall give sleep to His beloved; behold the inheritance of the Lord."<sup>‡</sup> The Wise Man says that the obedient man shall triumph over all his enemies: "An obedient man shall speak of victory."<sup>§</sup> But shall this victory be without its due reward? Most certainly not! For, in another place, the Holy Spirit says: "To him that overcometh, I will give to eat of the tree of life, that is in the paradise of my God."<sup>||</sup> Labour,

\* *Reg.*, cap. ii.  
§ *Prov.* xxi. 28.

† *Ibid.*, cap. v.  
|| *Apoc.* ii. 7.

‡ *Grad.* iv.

therefore, as a valiant soldier of Christ ; strive manfully by the most efficacious means and with the glorious arms of obedience ; conquer self-will, if you desire, in paradise, to be for ever satisfied with the sweet feast of God's never-failing banquet. Look at the glorious Choirs of the Saints and the countless multitudes of your own Brethren, and you will see how great are the rewards which the truly obedient enjoy. One of the Fathers, when rapt in ecstasy, saw standing before the throne of God four classes of men. The first consisted of those who, when they were stricken down on the bed of sickness, gave thanks to God. The second comprised those who, on earth, had exercised hospitality. The third was made up of those who lived in solitude, and who saw not their fellow-men. The fourth consisted of those who, for God's sake and through love of obedience, were subject to their Superiors. The last class, who had been obedient, were far higher than the other three ; they were adorned with golden raiment ; and they enjoyed a greater degree of glory. The old Monk asked the Angel, who during the vision had pointed out these things to him, why the fourth class were more resplendent with glory than the rest ? The blessed Spirit answered and said : " Because all the others, from time to time, had opportunities of doing their own will, even in the good works which they performed ; but the obedient, by renouncing their own will, depended on the will of their Spiritual Father, and, therefore, obtained a more abundant measure of glory than the rest."\* Therefore, deny your will, and have it always ready to do the bidding of your Superior. Act thus to the end of your life and strive ever to advance higher and higher in the scale of perfection. Thus, you also will be counted among the number of those who are of this fourth class, and with them you will enjoy a more glorious reward.

\* Rosweid, *Vitæ Patrum*, lib. iii., No. 141.



## MEDITATION III.

CHRIST'S LOVE OF US AND THE EXAMPLE OF HIS  
SAINTS, URGING US TO ACQUIRE OBEDIENCE.

I. Consider, then, the height and the depth, the length and the breadth, of Christ's love for you. What human intelligence is able to give even a faint idea of it? For your sake He came into this world; assumed human nature; He was born in a stable; was laid in a manger; He began His life in poverty, passed it in poverty, and ended it in pain and contempt. St. Francis Xavier, fired with divine love, cries out: "On the Cross, my Jesus! Thou hast embraced me. Thou didst endure the nails, the lance, pains and sorrows innumerable, the sweat of blood, anguish unutterable, and death; and all this for me, and for me, a sinner!" I ask you, therefore, do you love Him Who has loved you so much? Can you answer with St. Peter: "Thou knowest, Lord, that I love Thee?" If you can do so, more is asked of you—to prove by deeds that which it is so easy to say in words. "My son," says St. John, "let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth."\* Hence St. Gregory says: "The proof of love consists in acts which make love evident." But, you may ask: "By what works am I to prove my love?" Hear what St. Paul says on this subject: "The charity of Christ presseth us, that they who live may not now live to themselves, but unto Him Who died for them."† Therefore, let this be your aim in life, no longer to live for self—that is to say, for your own pleasure and for the gratification of your own will—but rather for Christ, by the humble submission of your will to His will, and to the will of those who, being your Superiors, hold His place. This is the strongest motive that our holy Father suggests to his children to incite them to offer to God the sacrifice of an obedience absolute in every respect, "to esteem nothing more highly than they esteem Christ." If to this motive you add the consideration of the examples of perfect obedience which He has given, you

\* 1 *St. John* iii. 18.† 2 *Cor.* v. 14-15.

cannot but purpose and desire with the most burning affection of your heart to follow the footsteps of this Master and Leader. Therefore, attentively consider how your most loving Saviour spent His whole life in the continual practice of obedience; for, as St. Paul testifies: "He was obedient unto death; even to the death of the Cross."\* He was obedient to his Eternal Father, to His earthly Mother, to St. Joseph, to wicked men, to His unjust Judges, to His executioners, to His enemies. In order that He may be present with us, under the species of bread and wine, He every day and at well-nigh every moment of the day, obeys the voice of His priests, even though they may chance to be impious, abominable, and actuated by the most unworthy motives. He was obedient in all things without any exception; in matters which He saw might be ordered far better otherwise; in matters which were commanded in excitement of mind, with perversity of will, with the intention of destroying Him; in matters most difficult, most painful, and full of opprobrium to Himself; even unto death and unto the death of the Cross. Well might He say by the mouth of the Prophet: "I do not resist. I have not gone back. I have given my body to the strikers and my cheeks to them that plucked them; I have not turned away my face from them that rebuked me and spat upon me."† Imprint these words on your mind. Never let the memory of them fade away, that by recalling them you may spur yourself on to imitate the glorious example of your Lord.

2. Reflect on the example of those Saints who, by their obedience, have proved themselves to be true disciples and children of their and of your holy Father. St. Maurus, when ordered by St. Benedict to run and draw St. Placid from the water into which the youth had fallen, hastened to obey the command, and, walking on the water to the place whither the stream had carried St. Placid, thinking all the while that he himself was on dry land, manifested by this miracle the wonderful efficacy of obedience.‡ The Archbishop St. Bardo sharply rebuked a disobedient Monk and told him that the

\* *Philip*, ii. 8.

† *Isaias* i. 5-6.

‡ S. Gregorii, lib. ii. *Dialog*.

sum of the divine service is obedience, for the sake of which Christ submitted Himself even unto death.\* As soon as St. Gervinus became a Monk, he was obedient to the rest of the Community, and by this means endeared himself to them all. St. Wulstan, Bishop of Worcester, was so obedient and so submissive to those who had authority over him that, no matter how hard and difficult their commands might be, he nevertheless straightway willingly set about the accomplishment of them, although he might not be able really to carry his goodwill into effect. St. Dominic of Silos, renouncing his own will, followed up the pursuit of obedience with all the power and the zeal of his soul; and by searching the examples which the Saints have left us, came to the conclusion that obedience is the foundation of all other virtues. St. Peter Damian, in order more efficaciously by his own example to stir up his hearers to obedience, was accustomed to say: "If anything was ordered under obedience, this word inspired me with so great fear that nothing was able to delay me in the execution of the command which had been imposed." Therefore, love obedience which is so pleasing to God and to man; and, during the third point, immolate yourself wholly unto God as a holocaust of obedience.

\* Mabillon.



## EIGHTH DAY

### MEDITATION I.

#### THE FOURTH REQUISITE IN A GOOD NOVICE—EAGERNESS FOR HUMILIATION.

I. WHAT does St. Benedict mean when he says, that the Novice should be eager for humiliation? Our holy Father means that the Novice should be truly and from the very bottom of his heart of a lowly mind.

But in order that you may clearly understand in what consists true, solid humility, or lowliness of mind—a virtue which is of so vital importance to every Novice and to every Religious, but especially to those who are either Novices or Religious of the Benedictine Order—we put before you, for your careful study, the “mystic ladder of humility,” by which you may climb to the very summit of that perfection to which it is possible to attain in this life, and may at last reach even unto the possession of God Himself.

This ladder is none other than that of which our holy Father speaks in the seventh chapter of the Rule. To those who have the courage to mount its various steps, he promises, even while they are in this life, the perfection of that charity which casteth out fear, and, in the life to come, that heavenly exaltation “which eye hath not seen, or ear heard, or the heart of man conceived.” This ladder consists of twelve steps or degrees, by which all the actions and the offices of true humility are described with the minutest accuracy.

If you climb to the topmost round, you will win for yourself that fourth quality which a good Novice or a Benedictine Religious, or, indeed, a Religious of any other Institute,

ought to possess. But, in order to fill your heart with courage great enough to face the toil of mounting this ladder, you must, in the first place, bear in mind the magnitude of the reward which is to be bestowed both in this life and in the life to come ; and, in the next place, you must fix your eyes on the earthly angels who are already ascending by that glorious way. By these we would have you understand the Saints and the perfect ; but particularly the Master and Model of perfect humility, Christ Jesus Who, from the first moment of His most holy conception till the last breath of His mortal life, ever persevered in the practice of the most profound humility. This humility filled both Angels and men with a stupor of amazement and made them clearly comprehend that it is a virtue which, more than other virtues, He wished us to learn of Him : “ Learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart.”\*

2. Therefore, the first step or degree of humility is the fear of the Lord ; and with reason, for, the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord. This fear may be said to be the foundation of the whole spiritual edifice, or—to adhere to the original figure—it is that step without which one cannot mount any higher ; for, as the second, third, and succeeding steps necessarily presuppose the existence of the first, so also do the remaining degrees or steps of this and of the other virtues necessarily presuppose the fear of the Lord. Hence that saying of the Wise Man : “ Unless thou hold thyself diligently in the fear of the Lord, thy house shall quickly be overthrown.”† The marks and the effects of this fear are : first, a great and supreme detestation of all sin, not only of mortal sin—the commission of which in a Religious would be horrible beyond the power of words to express—but also of even that which is venial, and more especially if it is deliberate ; secondly, a flight from all occasions of even slightly offending Our good God ; thirdly, careful guardianship of ourselves against forgetfulness of anything that it is incumbent on us to remember and to do either as Christians or as Religious ; fourthly, watchfulness over our thoughts

\* *St. Matth.* xi. 29.

† *Eccclus.* xxvii. 4.

and desires and the speedy repression of all those that are unlawful ; fifthly, denial of self-will ; sixthly, a care for and an esteem of small things. Do you perceive in yourself any of these marks ? If you do not, then at once earnestly direct your attention to the acquisition of them, and, when you have acquired them, to the careful preservation of them. Be on your guard, however, against the admission into your heart of any other fear than the fear of the Lord. Worldly fear dreads the evil of punishment and the losses which men are able to inflict upon us ; it dreads to displease them, or to offend them, or to incur their resentment. Properly speaking, this fear is called *human respect*. Unless it is made subordinate to the fear of the Lord, it oftentimes succeeds in casting out of the heart the fear of God.

Oh, how worthless, how full of unrest, how fickle, how mean is that man's heart which is held captive by this fear ! Do you cast it forth from your heart ; and when you have cast it out, most firmly resolve to do everything carefully, holily, and honestly, as if there were in existence no other beings than yourself and God. Therefore, " Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long ; because thou shalt have hope in the latter end, and thy expectation shall not be taken away."\*

3. Consider the second, the third, and the fourth degree of humility. Unite in yourself these three degrees, because they are necessary for true obedience which we have elsewhere said is inseparable from humility, and for that reason obedience is counted among the degrees of this inestimable virtue.

The second degree teaches us to deny self-will. This can and it must be done : (1) By a due observance of the divisions of time, not only with respect to time itself—by doing everything at the moment at which it is ordered to be done and by accomplishing that which has been commanded—but also with respect to the manner in which each thing must be done, namely, internally, with a good and supernatural motive, through love of God, of our own perfection,

\* *Prov.* xxiii. 17.



and with pious affection of heart; externally, with all exactitude and diligence, without the intermixture of anything that does not pertain to it, with all modesty and with the other circumstances which are proper and fitting to each action. (2) By a willing compliance and obedience in all matters that are left to our free choice; (3) and in matters which are repugnant to self-will. (4) By a speedy denial of our will in the daily recurring occasions which present themselves for the exercise of this virtue. Also, when any extraordinary chance for so doing may offer itself. Oh, how many and how glorious will be the crowns which you will win by the exercise of this self-denial, if only you will go on to the very end perseveringly doing this for God's sake!

The third degree of humility prescribes that, in imitation of Christ, obedience should be given to the Elders. Of this obedience we have spoken at considerable length in the preceding Meditations.

Finally, the fourth degree is to join patience and meekness with humility; for, as it is impossible that there should always be issued commands which are in accordance with our natural inclinations, and, as it will sometimes happen that orders which are hard, contrary to our instincts, and galling to our inborn notions of our own dignity are given to us, we repeat that patience and meekness must be joined with obedience. Do not grow weary. Do not give up the contest as hopeless. Above all things, never through disgust and bitterness of soul abandon your good beginnings. On the contrary, do manfully, let your heart be strengthened, and do you wait for the Lord, bearing in mind that "through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God"; also, "that Christ Himself Whom all the Saints have followed had to suffer and so to enter into His glory." Are you better than Christ? Are you superior to His Virgin Mother and to the holy Apostles, that you seek for another way to heaven different from that by which they have gone thither?

How little account will a man make of all that in this life appears hard and bitter, if he keep before the eyes of his

mind those flames which are never extinguished, that outer darkness, that gnashing of teeth, and that everlasting weeping and wailing which are in hell !

## MEDITATION II.

### OF THE FIFTH, SIXTH, AND SEVENTH DEGREES OF HUMILITY.

I. By the fifth degree of humility, our holy Lawgiver teaches you to lay open before your Spiritual Father your evil thoughts and the secret faults which you commit. This manifestation may be made in two ways : in confession, and out of confession. By the manifestation which is made in confession, we mean the sacramental confession itself. As this sacred action has very often to be performed in the course of the Religious Life, the following counsels must be observed if you desire to make it with fruit. We speak, as a matter of course, about the confession of venial sins ; because we take it for granted that he who has once for all made up his mind to serve God in Religion, will never again return to his evil courses, if he should have had the misfortune previously to have fallen into sin ; or, if he have never been guilty of any grave offence, that he will not, during the course of his Religious Life, mortally offend Our good God. In the first place, therefore, take special care to go to this Sacrament, not out of mere custom, or to follow the example of others, or to comply with the wishes of Superiors ; on the contrary, approach it with living faith, with steadfast hope, with a great affection for and an ardent desire of purity of conscience and of your own personal advancement in perfection.

Secondly, do not examine with scrupulosity and anxiety into the state of your conscience ; for, as there is no obligation to confess these venial faults, there need not be any scrupulous examination into them. Nevertheless, even with respect to these, a reasonable diligence will not be misplaced ; for, it is very advantageous to confess them. Half

the difficulty with respect to this examination will be overcome by him who is in the habit of daily scrutinising his conscience.

Thirdly, as soon as the examination has been made, an act of sorrow, accompanied by a firm purpose of amendment, must straightway be elicited, lest these important parts of penance should altogether escape your memory. In order that you may have true sorrow for sin, never for a moment lay aside the firm resolve which you have made to love and to serve God, to pursue righteousness and truth, and with all your strength to strive after perfection. Also, take special care never to make little account of offending God by venial sin. With respect to the purpose of amendment, it is sufficient to have a general intention of avoiding venial sins and of gradually diminishing them in gravity, or in species, or in number, or in the affection which you have for them, or in the amount of deliberation with which you commit them. In order more efficaciously to grieve for them, call to mind those sins of which you are most ashamed and which you most ardently desire to avoid. If no sins of this kind present themselves to your memory, you may choose out, from your past confessions, some particular sins, and once again submit them to the keys, as most displeasing to you and also most easy to reform.

Fourthly, the actual confession of your sins ought to be:

(1) *Humble*—that is to say, you ought internally to admit that you are really guilty; moreover, it should be of such a nature as that the deportment of your body may indicate the sorrow of your soul.

(2) *Shamefaced*—that is, the sins ought to be revealed slowly and with confusion of soul. The more the confession has of this sentiment of shame and of sorrow, the better and more pleasing it is to God, from Whose treasure-house these qualities are bestowed on men of goodwill. It offers unto Him a full satisfaction, obtains a more copious measure of grace, gains a more decisive victory over self and the devil, and more effectually moves the Confessor to sentiments of mercy and affection, because it completely and with all



sincerity makes known to him the miseries of human nature, and the confusion with which sin covers the soul.

(3) *Sincere and candid*, by explaining everything, as far as possible, clearly, distinctly, prudently, and without anxiety.

(4) *Short*, by omitting all idle and useless circumlocutions.

(5) *True*, by neither adding anything in order to humble yourself, nor by taking away anything in order to excuse your faults; by confessing that which is doubtful as doubtful matter, and that which is certain as certain matter, just as you perceive it in your conscience.

(6) Finally, let your confession, with respect to your Confessor, be full of confidence and of faith. Do not look on him as a mere man, but as the representative of God. Hence, treat him with all reverence, both in the sacred tribunal and out of it, because he is, with respect to you, a father, physician, and friend, with whom you must frankly communicate, without being ashamed to open out before his eyes the most secret recesses of your heart. Therefore, turn to God and with the most ardent affection of your soul, thank Him for a benefit of so great magnitude and resolve for the future to make the best possible use of it.

With respect to the manifestation of conscience which is made out of confession, we exhort you to allow your whole soul to be seen by your Spiritual Director. To his eyes your conscience ought to be as if it was of crystal, so that he may, whenever he pleases, look into it and know it as well, or even better, than you yourself know it. Do not wait till he asks leave to search its inmost folds, but beg of him to inspect them and do you yourself lay them open before his eyes. Do not, by your silence and by your secrecy, invite the devil to tempt you, but straightway acquaint your Spiritual Guide with Satan's first suggestions. For, to hide one's self from one's Spiritual Father, to avoid being well known by him, is a grave fault in a Novice; it is the first stone of the devil's house, the first step towards tepidity, unrest, and ruin. This openness with the Spiritual Father is so necessary for and it ought to be so peculiarly the characteristic of the Novice, that no other quality ought to

be recommended with more urgency to your notice ; for, this openness is so much of a necessity for you that, if it is wanting, nothing else can supply its place ; and if you possess it, you will not long be lacking in any other good qualities. Oh, how great consolation, repose, and tranquillity do those persons begin to experience in their souls who are careful to follow out to the very letter all these sage counsels ! Those who neglect to act upon the wisdom which they contain are tossed hither and thither by the conflicting emotions of an uneasy mind ; they expose themselves to the greatest danger of offending God and of altogether falling away from their holy calling.

2. "The sixth degree of humility is that a Monk should be content with all that is meanest and poorest, and in everything that is enjoined him that he should consider himself to be an evil and worthless servant." Therefore, always be content with all that is poorest in eating and in drinking ; in clothing, in furniture, in place of abode ; and with all that is meanest as to state, position, occupation ; being ever mindful of Jesus Christ Who was poor. Never at any time be ambitious of obtaining, and still less be desirous of procuring advancement to ecclesiastical dignities and offices, to honourable occupations and to high rank, but, with respect to these and to other matters of a similar nature, depend entirely on the will of your Superior, contenting yourself with the lowest, the most abject offices and duties, saying with the Prophet : "I have been brought to nothing, and I knew it not. I have become as a beast before Thee, and I am always with Thee."\* What greater happiness, what greater dignity, can be imagined than to be always with the Lord ? Acquire this degree of humility and you will not care for, still less will you aim at winning for yourself that which the world esteems so highly ; but you will enjoy a most profound peace. Your loving Saviour disdained not to abide until His thirtieth year in a lowly workshop, and He was willing humbly to obey St. Joseph, in order to teach you to find contentment in the execution of every office to which your Superiors may think fit to appoint

\* *Ps.* lxxii. 22.

you, although you yourself may imagine that you are capable of filling posts of far greater importance.

3. The seventh degree, in which the whole substance of humility is, as it were, contained, is that you not only should proclaim with your tongue but should believe in your heart that you are the most abject of beings and inferior to all others. Therefore, never prefer yourself to any one, no matter how much more amply endowed you may imagine yourself to be in natural gifts and favours; on the contrary, frequently say to yourself: "What hast thou that thou hast not received?" Christ Jesus willed to be the last of men. Will you, then, prefer yourself to Him? Never judge any man; particularly if there is question of the intentions and of the affections of his heart. Only God can know secrets of this kind: "Therefore," says the Apostle, "judge not before the time until the Lord shall come, Who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of hearts."\* Oh, how different from the judgments of men will be the judgments of God! To show, in very deed, that you are fully convinced of this in your own case and at the present time, stir up, dispose, resign, offer yourself, and resolve heroically and with a determination which nothing can shake, never, by any sign or by any manner of acting, to let it be seen, that you take amiss any correction or any humiliation that is given to you by a Superior, or an equal, or an inferior, whether friendly or hostile; whether in a discreet or in an indiscreet manner; whether with bitterness or with benevolence; whether with sharpness or with sweetness; whether publicly or privately; whether within or without the Monastery; but, with a quiet mind, most humbly, meekly, peacefully, and with great love of God—Who permits such things to happen, and suffers men to try you—to bear it with all patience. Thus, in whatever dignity you may be placed, in whatever state you may find yourself, whether happy or wretched, whether lofty or lowly, whether you are in health or in sickness, receive with a quiet mind all that comes upon you,

\* 1 Cor. iv. 5.



without excusing yourself by reason of any sudden chance, or of any unforeseen circumstance; without exception of any matter, or of any person whatever.

### MEDITATION III.

#### OF THE REMAINING DEGREES OF HUMILITY.

1. By the eighth degree of humility, two kinds of singularity are forbidden: the one, which sins by excess; the other, which sins by defect. He is singular by excess who of his own accord, undertakes works which go beyond his State, as, for instance, if a Benedictine were to endeavour to lead the life of a hermit. On the other hand, he is singular by defect, who follows a method of life less perfect than that to which he has bound himself, and who does not do that which his State requires of him.

To obtain the eighth degree the following precepts must be observed: (1) Never prefer private exercises of piety to those that are common. Have a greater esteem for obedience than for any particular acts of devotion. Set a high value on exercises common to the whole Community; love them; perform them with care; and neither desire nor procure for yourself, on far-fetched pretences, any exemptions whatever. (2) Take care never by word or by example to give any occasion for scandal, or for the slightest relaxation of regular discipline. Give heedful note to that which in a former meditation we have said on this matter.

He, however, is not by any means to be accused of singularity who with firm determination faithfully guards the statutes of the Rule, though living among those who have somewhat relaxed the rigour of strict observance. These latter ought, with far more truth, to be called *singular*, because they are living and acting in a manner that is contrary to Rule. Let it be your aim to do that which God, St. Benedict, and your Superiors require from you, without paying any attention to that which others may either say or do, being careful at the same time not to pass any judgment on them or on their actions.

Spurred on by the example of so many Saints of our Order who have won heavenly glory for themselves by the way of regular observance, resolve manfully to tread in their footsteps.

2. The ninth, tenth, and eleventh degrees of humility teach you how you are rightly to regulate the times for speaking and for keeping silence. The times and the places appointed by our holy Father for keeping silence are the hours of the night, beginning with the end of Compline and lasting till after the little Chapter at Prime on the following morning; also during meals, if they are appointed by Rule and there is no dispensation granted by Superiors to engage in conversation. On these occasions the strictest silence—*summum silentium*—must be kept. The times and the places in which ordinary silence is observed—that is to say, silence which for some urgent necessity may be broken, and a few words may be spoken in a low tone of voice—are all other times with the exception of those already mentioned. The places in which silence has to be observed and which have been specially mentioned by St. Benedict are the Refectory, the Dormitory, and the Oratory. To these places some writers add the Sacristy.

In order to make this time of silence profitable, let your heart speak to God. "Oh, how full of glory is that silence," says St. Bernard, "in which the words of the Lord are pure words, are chaste words!"\* To conceive a love for the observance of silence, look at Jesus Christ the perfect exemplar of every virtue. Although He is eternal wisdom, and He might have converted many thousands by His preaching, yet for thirty years He holds His peace and says nothing. To the amazement of the pagan judge, He is silent during His trial, though He might by a word have delivered Himself from all His sufferings. Attentively consider the counsels which the Holy Spirit gives concerning silence: "Death and life are in the hands of the tongue."† "A man full of tongue shall not be established in the earth."‡ "If any man think himself to be religious, not bridling his tongue, that man's religion

\* *De Ordin. Vita*, cap. iv.

† *Prov.* xviii. 21.

‡ *Ps.* cxxxix. 12.

is vain.”\* “In silence and in hope shall your strength be.”† Silence is the worship of justice. With respect to the matter of your speech, beware of ever uttering either words that are scurrilous and idle, or words that excite to laughter; these words our holy Father utterly condemns in all places; he does not allow his disciples to open their mouths to give them utterance.‡ “O Jesus Christ! Who hast carefully weighed Thy copious tears, Thy continual sorrow and affliction of heart, how canst Thou be softened, dissolved, melted by levity?”

In the chapter on the “Instruments of Good Works” you will find that the following “instruments” have reference to this subject: 27, 28, 32, 39, 40, 52, 53, 54, 67.§

Let your manner of speaking be: (1) Mild; that is, let it be sweet, temperate, quiet. (2) Let it be without laughter, with modest cheerfulness, but without sternness and without harshness. (3) Your speech should be humble; that is, it should not be larded with big, swollen, pompous, boastful, and biting words. (4) It should be grave, both in matter and in manner. With respect to the matter of it, it should be upright and void of everything that would be unbecoming in a mouth consecrated to God. With respect to the manner, it ought not to be accompanied with gestures of the hands and with movements of the body. These offend against the rules of religious modesty. (5) Your words should be few and rational; that is to say, they should be so maturely and prudently weighed and considered beforehand, that if you were suddenly called upon to give a reason for what you have said, you would at once be able to do so; and the reason which you give ought to be such that it would meet with the approval of God. (6) Your words ought not to be uttered in a loud tone of voice. In this respect, put before your mind’s eye the example of Our most loving Saviour, Who was so moderate in His use of words that He never spoke any that were not most holy, most useful, most admirably adapted to the occasions on which they were

\* *S. James* i. 26.

† *Reg.*, cap. vi.

† *Isaias* xxx. 15.

§ *Ibid.*, cap. iv.



spoken, and to the needs of the persons for whose benefit they were uttered. They were, at the same time, most suitable in the manner in which they were delivered.

Give to this your attentive consideration, and imitate the example which is put before you.

3. The twelfth degree of humility, a degree which prescribes lowliness in external behaviour and a strict custody over the eyes, has its source: (1) In the remembrance of sin—"Thinking himself guilty for his sins." (2) In the constant remembrance of the dread judgment seat—"Let him think that he is about to be presented before the tribunal of God." (3) In the remembrance of the Publican's conduct and of the words of the Royal Prophet. Add to these (4) the example of Jesus Christ. How great, how excellent, think you, must have been the modest composure of this Master of self-abasement?

Of a truth, it was none other than that which exhibited to the eyes of those who looked on Him, God's own beautiful prototype of modesty and humility.

Picturing to himself the outward appearance of Our divine Lord, St. Bernard says: "When I utter the name 'Jesus,' I place before myself a man meek and humble of heart; kind, moderate, chaste, merciful; in fine, a man remarkable for all holiness and righteousness."\* Never turn your mind's eye away from the contemplation of this model. Conform yourself with Him. Imitate Him. Strive to be another Jesus.

"Thus, when all these degrees of humility have been ascended, the Monk will presently come to that love of God which is perfect and which casteth out fear, to that love whereby everything that in the beginning he observed through fear, he will now begin to do by custom, without any labour, and, as it were, naturally; not now through the fear of hell, but for the love of Christ, out of a good custom and a delight in virtue. All this Our Lord will vouchsafe to work by the Holy Ghost in His servant, now that he is cleansed from defects and sins."†

These are the words with which our holy Father con-

\* *Sermo xxv. in Cantic.*

† *Reg., cap. vii.*

cludes his chapter on humilty. Do you, therefore, "in your heart dispose to ascend by steps, in the vale of tears," that you may deserve to see the God of gods in Sion. Be not satisfied with having seen this ladder in vision only, as Jacob saw it, or with having contemplated the ascending forms of others who are leading the lives of earthly angels, but do you also arise, advance, and, laying hold of the sides, go upwards, and cease not till you obtain possession of God Himself Who is standing on the topmost round. Then there will be unto you joy and glory unutterable, before God, and Angels, and men.

## THIRD PART

# THE NOVICE

### INTRODUCTION

IN the fifty-eighth chapter of the Rule, our holy Father treats of the method to be observed in admitting to the Brotherhood those persons who may wish to join his Institute. His words, in that passage, give ample instruction to the Abbot, the Community, the Novice Master, and the Novice himself, concerning their respective duties in this important matter. However, as it is our intention in this little work to deal chiefly with the dispositions requisite on the part of the Novice and with the obligations which bind him, we will confine our remarks to those things for which St. Benedict legislates when treating of the Novice.

These are: "That he should be sent to the Novitiate; that he should there meditate, and eat, and sleep; that he should be placed under the guidance of an Elder or Spiritual Father; that he should truly seek God, and that he should be eager for the 'Work of God,' for obedience, and for humiliation." In the next place, that all the rigour and the austerity of the Rule should be clearly set before his eyes; that he himself should promise to be steadfast in his purpose; that thrice during the year of probation—that is to say, in the second, the eighth, and the twelfth month—the Rule should be read to him, to give him an accurate knowledge of the kind of life which he wishes to embrace.

On each of these occasions, that the following words should be addressed to him: "Behold the Law under which thou desirest to fight; if thou canst observe it, enter; if



thou canst not, freely depart." Furthermore, that his patience should be tested in every possible way. Finally, that if, after mature deliberation, he promise to observe all the Rule and in all things to obey his Superiors; and if, after having spent a whole year under the training of the afore-mentioned discipline, he be found worthy to be received into the Brotherhood, he shall, at last, be admitted into the Community. From that time forth, according to the enactment of the Rule, he must not leave the Monastery, or withdraw his neck from the yoke of obedience which he took on himself after so ripe a deliberation; whereas he might, had he so willed, easily have refused to carry so weighty a burthen.

Under these twelve heads is contained all that our holy Father wishes to be taught to the Novice. Therefore, it will be our aim in this work to develop in as many chapters the lessons which he wishes to be conveyed to him. These lessons will be set before you with so great minuteness, that you will know how to use, to the best advantage, your year of trial. They will enable you to look at yourself, as it were in a mirror, and to see whether you have acquired those qualities which our holy Father expects to find in those who desire to be ranked among the number of his children.

## CHAPTER I

“LET HIM BE IN THE NOVITIATE, WHERE HE SHALL  
MEDITATE, AND EAT, AND SLEEP”

### SECTION I.

#### *Of being in the Novitiate.*

IN treating of the education of Novices, our holy Father first makes arrangements about the place in which the process of their spiritual training is to be carried on; for, he was well aware of the important part which this seemingly unimportant matter plays in the beginning of the Religious Life. He calls this place the “*Cella Novitiorum*,” or the Novitiate—a house standing apart from the abode of the rest of the Brethren, and standing apart in order to instil into the minds of the Novices a love of solitude; for, it is in solitude that men receive more abundantly of the outpouring of God’s grace, and become better skilled in courageous resistance to the onslaughts of the devil, who ordinarily with great fury attacks those who are beginning their spiritual life. St. Benedict has given, in his own person, an excellent example of a love of solitude; for, in his early youth, and while himself a mere Novice, he fled from the tumult of Rome and hid himself in a desert place. There, by one heroic act of self-denial, he triumphed over the devil, the world, and the flesh, as may be seen in his life. Our divine Lord also taught us to love solitude, when before beginning His missionary labours He retired into a desert place, and by vanquishing the devil, in the threefold temptation where-with that wicked spirit essayed to break down His virtue, gained a glorious victory over our common enemy.

Do you, therefore, in the same spirit with which Jesus Christ entered the desert, enter the cell which is assigned to you; or, in that spirit with which He entered the stable, at the moment of His birth; or, with which our holy Father entered the solitude of Subiaco. Gird up your loins to fight against the devil, the world, and the flesh and to meet the other difficulties and trials which will assail you in the wilderness. Frequently repeat to yourself these memorable words of the Wise Man: "Son, when thou comest to the service of God, stand in justice and in fear, and prepare thy soul for temptation."\* But, though full of fear, do not lose confidence in God; for, it is written: "No one hath hoped in the Lord, and hath been confounded."† The whole second chapter of Ecclesiasticus is well worthy of your perusal, on the first day of your entrance into Religious Life.

Therefore, love your cell as if it were a very heaven on earth; for, as St. Bernard remarks: "*Cælum*, the Latin word for heaven, and *cella*, the Latin word for cell, are near of kin;" or, as we might say in English, "*cell* and *celestial* are near of kin." A little farther on he says: "The ascent from one's cell to the celestial kingdom is a matter of frequent occurrence; but rarely does it happen that any one descends from his cell to the nether pit; unless, indeed, it is that he goes thither only in thought during his day of life, in order to save himself from having to descend thither after his death. But, after death, seldom is any one cast into hell from his monastic cell; for, scarcely any, except those persons who are destined to eternal life, persevere in it till death."‡ Therefore, with great fervour, enter your cell and remain hidden in it as constantly as your duties will allow. When first you enter it, fall on your knees and give God thanks for the special mark of favour which He has shown you in calling you to His holy service and deigning to enrol you among the number of His children. Make a firm resolve never to forsake Him, but faithfully to persevere in your calling until death, saying with the Psalmist: "This

\* *Ecclus.* ii. 1.

† *Cap.* ii. 11.

‡ *De Vita Solit.*, cap. iv.



is my rest for ever and ever ; here will I dwell, for, I have chosen it."\*

Lastly, in order that our most bountiful God may bestow on you grace to carry this resolve into effect, with all humility beseech Him to come to your aid. Never suffer the esteem and the love which you have for your religious calling to diminish, but strive daily to increase them ; for, it is certain that during your Religious Life your progress in perfection will be in exact proportion to your increase in these most necessary qualities.

## SECTION II.

### *Of Meditation, Food, and Sleep.*

After determining the place in which the Novice is to be trained, our holy Father next informs him that, with the exception of the time devoted to such necessary duties as bodily nourishment and rest, his life, during the year of probation, must be employed in *meditation*. But in what sense this word is used, we will now proceed to explain.

According to Bernard of Cassino, Turrecremata, and Smaragdus, *meditation* must be taken to mean "reading, psalmody, vocal prayer, mental prayer, and in fact anything else that pertains to spiritual duties ;" so that they regard *meditation* as a *generic* rather than as a *specific* term. Therefore, by employing it in this way, our holy Father wishes to intimate that, during the year of Novitiate, you do not belong wholly to yourself, but that, however much you may be occupied in other honest and necessary duties, you must wish to free yourself from their entanglements, to give yourself to the pursuit of spiritual things, and in these, both by day and by night, to exercise the faculties of your soul. For, if, as it is commonly asserted, other sciences require the attention of the *whole* man, with how much greater reason may we say that this sublime science of spirituality, dealing as it does with practical rather than with speculative matters, demands that he should throw into the study of it,

\* Ps. cxxxi. 14.

and especially at the beginning, all the mental power that he is able to command? Therefore, at your first entrance into the Novitiate, imagine that our holy Father addresses to you those words which St. Paul wrote to his disciple Timothy: "Exercise thyself unto godliness; for, bodily exercise is profitable to little," a statement which may be made of all that does not, by a good intention and by obedience, pertain to the spirit and to God, "but godliness is profitable to all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."\*

Again; as *meditation*, according to Menochius,† properly signifies to exercise one's self in thought, in speech, and in act, you need not, in order to comply with our holy Father's wishes, have your mind always on the stretch; nor need you withdraw yourself from external work; all that is required of you is that whatever you do, or think, or say, should be said, or thought, or done for God, or should at least by a pure intention be referred to Him, conformably with that saying of the Apostle: "Do all things in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, that in all things, and through all things, God may be glorified," setting aside all human motives and all human considerations. By acting thus, you will comply with our holy Lawgiver's wishes in this respect. That which the devout Blossius says, with regard to a pure intention, will find a suitable place here: "Whenever we are usefully and honestly engaged in reading or in meditating, in writing or in speaking on any speculative or on any spiritual matter, we do not thereby withdraw ourselves from the contemplation of God; nor are we separated from Him, when through any lawful necessity and with a becoming sobriety and moderation of spirit, we apply ourselves to our ordinary affairs."

Furthermore, by using the word *meditation*, our holy Father wishes you to understand that, during the period of your probation, you should in a most special manner devote yourself to the perfection and the salvation of your own soul, and that you should not suffer yourself to be filled with a misplaced zeal for the perfection and the salvation of

\* 1 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

† In Ps. i.

the souls of other men. St. Theresa, that illustrious mistress of the Spiritual Life, was well aware of the mischief which this snare effects among beginners, who have no sooner tasted the Lord's sweetness than they would fain straightway have others share in the delights which they enjoy. In acting thus, they seem to forget that their own personal progress is likely to be retarded; for, they usually pay far more attention to the correction of other men's defects than they do to the correction of their own, and in consequence of this they are exposed to many afflictions and sorrows. It is with a view to hinder his children from being entrapped by this snare, that our holy Father orders those who are Novices in the Spiritual Life "*to meditate*"—that is to say, to busy themselves about the sanctification of only their own souls. The same idea is put forth still more clearly by St. Theresa: "In the beginning of our Spiritual Life, our chief care should be bestowed on our own souls. We should think that, besides God and our soul, there is no one else in the world." In another place she says: "It is safest for us to lay aside the care of all other persons and of all other things, to be responsible for ourselves only and to strive to please God. To act thus is, in very truth, of the utmost importance, and is most becoming in one who wishes to be a Religious." After a due consideration of these various reasons, you should resolve to act on them, and to bring your life into conformity with that which they teach. Therefore, lay aside all care and all other business. Concentrate your energy on spiritual things. Refer to God everything that you do by Rule, and give your undivided attention to the perfection of your own soul.

A few remarks will not be out of place here, on these words of St. Benedict: "That the Novice not only should meditate in the Novitiate, but should there sleep and eat." These actions must be done in a manner suitable not only to Religious, but to those who have renounced the pleasures of the world; so that in the very beginning of your Religious Life you may refrain from eating and from sleeping more than nature requires. For, as we read in the *Following of Christ*: "Bridle



gluttony, and thou wilt the more easily bridle all inclinations of the flesh.”\* “There is no sin,” says St. Benedict,† “more contrary to the Christian character—and with far greater reason to the religious character—than gluttony; therefore, Our Lord saith: ‘Take heed to yourselves lest, perhaps, your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and with drunkenness.’”

With respect to sleep and to sloth, we read in the Book of Proverbs:‡ “Love not sleep, lest poverty oppress thee;” and in the Book of Ecclesiastes:§ “Bow down thy shoulder (to Wisdom) and bear her, and be not grieved with her bonds.” Be fully persuaded that, unless you can master yourself in these respects, you will never become a truly religious man; for, as St. Gregory says: “In the spiritual conflict, no one becomes a victor unless he has first, by mortification of the appetite, vanquished all the evil tendencies of the flesh.”|| Speaking of the spirit of sloth, Cassian says: “He who gives himself up to idleness and to sleep will never obtain true justice, real charity, and lasting glory; for, ‘Every sleeper shall be clothed with ragged garments;’ or, as the Vulgate renders it: ‘Drowsiness shall be clothed with rags;’¶ for, of a certainty, the sluggard will not deserve to be clothed with that incorruptible garment of which the Apostle says: ‘Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ.’ Again; ‘Having on the breastplate of faith and of charity;’ and Our Lord, by the mouth of the Prophet: ‘Arise, arise, O Jerusalem! put on the garments of thy glory.’ Whoever suffers himself to be oppressed by the sleep of spiritual sloth prefers to be clothed with the rags of idleness rather than with those garments which are the fruit of his own industry.” We will here place before you the method of taking food and sleep, a method which was recommended by St. Bernard; also, an extract from the works of St. John Climacus, on spiritual sloth. If in the beginning of your Religious Life you keep before your eyes and endeavour to practise the counsels which these quotations contain, you

\* Bk. i., cap. xix.

† *Reg.*, cap. xxxix.

‡ Cap. xx.

§ Cap. vi. 26.

|| *Moral.*, lib. xxx., cap. clxv.

¶ Cassian, lib. x., cap. xxi.; *Prov.* xxiii.

will discover that the advice which they give may be followed out with the greatest ease; for, as St. Bernard says: "Your affections will be purified and your will will be renovated, so that everything that at first seemed difficult and well-nigh impossible, will afterwards be performed with the greatest alacrity and ease; and the pain which at first you experienced in the execution of difficult tasks, will be changed into so great joy that you will be able to cry out with the Psalmist: 'I have run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou didst enlarge my heart.' "\*"

I. St. Bernard (*De Vita Solit.*, cap. xi.): "Whether you eat, or drink, or whatever else you do, do all piously, holily, and religiously, for the glory of God. If you eat, let sobriety grace your frugal table; and, while you eat, be not wholly intent on your food, but at the same time that you nourish your body let not your soul be in want, but either fill it with some thought about the goodness of God, or occupy its faculties with some scriptural text which will supply food for cogitation. Do not in a carnal or in a worldly manner satisfy your bodily needs, but in a way which is befitting a Monk and servant of God. For, to look at the matter from the point of view of health, the more temperately and religiously you take your food, the more easily and profitably will you digest it. With respect to the manner in which you eat, you must take care not to suffer your whole soul to go out to your food; also, you must regulate the time of your refection, and the quality of that with which you regale yourself. As to the time, do not anticipate the hour for refection; as to the quality, conform yourself with the Community, except in cases of evident necessity. With respect to condiments, be satisfied that your food is palatable; do not aim at making it delightful; for, our concupiscence is evilly enough disposed when it is left to itself, and either is hardly able or is quite unable to satisfy itself; but it will prove more than a match for us if, instead of being perpetually warred against, it be aided and abetted by us. Then our chastity will be seriously imperilled.

\* Ps. cxviii. 32.

“What we have said with respect to food may with equal reason be said with respect to sleep. Take care, as far as in you lies, that your whole soul never is asleep, lest your rest, instead of being a necessary repose for your wearied body, should become the grave of your stifled soul; not the restorer, but the destroyer of your spirit. Sleep is a gratification in which we must never indulge without a certain amount of distrust. In some respects, it is not unlike drunkenness. For, with the exception of those vices which throw both soul and body into a deep and brutish stupor, there is nothing that is so opposed to our advancement in virtue, nothing that is so utterly lost to our life, as is the time which we devote to sleep. This is a fact which is admitted by all. Therefore, on retiring to rest, always have in your memory something on which you may calmly sleep; something which will be even conducive to sleep; something which will present itself to you when you awake, and restore you to the state of recollection in which you were living on the preceding day: ‘Thus night shall be to you like as the day, and night shall be your light in your pleasures.’\* Peacefully will you sleep; quietly will you rest; easily will you rise; and having risen, with eagerness and without difficulty will you return to that from which you had not altogether departed. Temperate sleep is a consequence of temperance in food and of temperance in thought. A sleep that is fleshly and brutish, in which utter oblivion swallows every thought and every sense, is an abomination to a true servant of God. That sleep, however, out of which after a suitable period of repose, it is an easy matter to awaken the senses of the body and the faculties of the soul and to send them forth, like the servants of the householder, to labour at works necessary for the spirit, such a sleep as this, when taken at the proper time and in due measure, is not by any means to be contemned.

“Therefore, let it be your special care with modest alacrity to spring from bed at the very moment in which you are called. This daily victory over self is most pleasing to God Who frequently rewards it with very signal graces and favours.”

\* *Ps. cxxxviii. 10, 11.*



2. St. John Climacus (*Grad.* 13): "It is especially on those occasions when difficult duties demand from the soul the exertion of its will-power, that temptations to slothfulness ordinarily present themselves. Hence, there is no vice that is, to the Monk, the occasion of so many crowns as is the vice of sloth. If you take the trouble to examine the matter, you will find that when the Monk is on foot, it fills him with weariness; when he is seated, it urges him to recline against the wall. Therefore, let this insidious foe be bound by the remembrance of your past sins; let him be scourged by means of manual labour; let him be imprisoned by the thought of the good things to come; and the moment that he presents himself before you, let him be thus interrogated: 'Tell me, thou good-for-nothing, idle wretch, whence art thou? Who are thy following? Who are thy worst opponents? Of whom art thou most in dread?' To those who thus question him, sloth will answer: 'I live with those who, in the tranquillity of their solitude, give me place; but, with the truly obedient, I find not any spot whereon to lay my head. The name which I bear is "Legion." Some men call me insensibility of soul, forgetfulness of heavenly things, want of recollection. My followers who are ever with me are change of place, disobedience to the Spiritual Father, unmindfulness of the Judgment to come, and, not unfrequently, apostasy from the solemn engagements which have been undertaken. As for the enemies by whom I am held in chains, these are, devout psalmody joined with hard labour and the constant remembrance of death. But that by which I am utterly undone, is prayer when it is joined with a most steadfast hope in the good things that are to come.'"

Your Novice Master and Spiritual Father, whom you must consult and obey, will no doubt on this head offer to you many other excellent suggestions which will be admirably adapted to your needs. We cannot do better, then, than conclude these remarks of St. John Climacus with a few apposite words from the illustrious St. Bernard.

"A god-fearing, prudent Religious will conduct himself in his cell just as a master would behave in the midst of his house-

hold. He will not, as the Wise Man observes, suffer his flesh to be unto him as a quarrelsome woman; he will have it inclined unto and accustomed to obedience; ready for labour and prepared to hunger and to be satiated; to be in abundance and to suffer want. He will not allow his bodily senses to be his rulers, but he will make them his servants; he will keep his intellectual faculties well in hand and ready for work. So well ordered and so admirably disciplined will his whole household be, that he will say to one: 'Go, and he will go;' and to another: 'Come, and he will come.' He who is thus able, within his own conscience, to rule and direct himself, may with complete trust be left to himself in his cell. But this disposition is found only in the perfect and in those who are beginning to be perfect. We have placed it before the minds of beginners, to show them that of which they stand in need, and to point out the distance which they have yet to go."

### SECTION III.

#### *Counsels to the Novice after the Reception of the Habit.*

Before treating of other matters prescribed by our holy Father for ensuring your true solid progress in the ways of perfection, we deem it advisable to offer a few very important suggestions which, if accepted in a good spirit and rightly acted on, will free you from many erroneous opinions and save you from the dangers which usually beset the path of the careless and inexperienced, and sometimes involve them in destruction.

First, endeavour, by every means in your power, to preserve and daily to increase your love and esteem of your vocation. For this purpose, never let a day pass without showing your gratitude to Our good God for so manifest an expression of His favour. He who has well weighed the magnitude of this special grace, will not be content with having once or twice given thanks for it; he will frequently during the day pour forth his whole heart in praise and in gratitude to God.

Secondly, remember that, ordinarily speaking, your whole future life, your progress in perfection and the measure of heavenly glory which you will receive, depend on the manner in which you begin and carry out this great, this all-important work of your probation. "For, a Religious," says De Ponte,\* "usually goes on living with the same fervent spirit with which he begins his spiritual life. If he begin with lukewarmness, he will go on with lukewarmness; if he begin with a fervent spirit, he will continue to advance with the same fervour of spirit; he will be able easily to keep it in a glow even to the end."

Also St. Bonaventure† says: "He who begins his religious career with a contempt for religious discipline is able only with great difficulty afterwards to conceive a respect and a love for it; for, it is an arduous task to change the habits which one has formed for one's self in the Novitiate." The reason is not far to seek; for, the year of probation is, as it were, the infancy of the Spiritual Life. That which is learnt during this period remains firmly rooted in the mind, even to old age. Hence, that well-known saying of the Wise Man: "A young man according to his way, even when he is old he will not depart from it;"‡ he will continue to advance with the same pace wherewith he set out on the journey of life.

This is a fact so well attested and so generally admitted that Cassian§ was able to say: "It is not an uncommon thing to see carnal and worldly-minded men attaining to great fervour in the Spiritual Life; but scarcely ever do we see those who are lukewarm and negligent in Religion, laying aside their lukewarmness and their negligence." God forbid that you should begin your new life with coldness; enter it with great earnestness, as St. Bernard advises, who, in his address to the Brethren *De Monte Dei*, says: "If you are a beginner, perfectly begin your work," that is to say, with a perfection suitable to a beginner; from your first entrance neglect none of those duties which, from the words

\* *Tract. ix., cap. xi.*

† *Prov. xxii. 6.*

‡ *Prol. Spec. discip.*

§ *Collat. iv., cap. xix.*



of our holy Lawgiver, you know are incumbent on a good Novice.

In direct opposition to this wish of St. Benedict, is the conduct of those Novices who, after having received the religious habit, put off from day to day all serious thought of correcting the vices and the faults which they contracted in the world; who, content with an outwardly decorous behaviour, care very little how it fares with the inward disposition of their hearts; who act through impulse, through human respect, through custom, but without any inward uplifting of the soul to God; without devotion and without any of those other qualities which infuse merit into human actions; who, in fine, persuade themselves that, *after* their profession, they will seriously apply themselves to the exercise of virtue, but imagine that for the present it is quite sufficient to be externally religious.

Those who are thus minded have good reason to fear that danger which ever threatens those who with lukewarmness begin their Religious Life—the danger of failing in it and of perishing miserably. For, they who, at the beginning of that life, give themselves up to sloth discover to their cost that this vice daily acquires a greater hold on them, and that they themselves hourly become less and less masters of themselves, till at last there is verified in them that malediction which David uttered against Mount Gelboe: “Let neither dew nor rain come upon you; neither be your fields of first-fruits,”\* that is to say, let them not bring forth a copious and early harvest of virtues; for, God detests their lukewarmness. Therefore, He does not visit them with the dew and rain of His heavenly favours. Consequently, they will never have the productiveness of those early Religious who were the first-fruits of the Order; or of those other fervent souls who, at their very entrance, are like to rich fields yielding golden crops to God, as an earnest of those abundant harvests which they will bear for Him during the remaining years of their life.

Thirdly, although, as we have already said, Religious Life

\* 2 Kings i. 21.

must be begun with great fervour, and the various difficulties and hardships which it entails be met and endured with courage, yet, while doing this, the measure of your bodily strength must be taken into account. You must not, through indiscreet fervour, tax it beyond its powers and thus utterly break it down, to your own great personal loss and to the loss of Religion; for, when health and strength are gone, you will be unable to perform the duties of a monastic life; and, besides this, you will be tempted to fall into a sluggish state of lukewarmness; you will be exposed to the deceits of pride; you will be inclined to give way to despair; to become lax; to assume a false liberty of action; and, finally, altogether to give up the pursuit of perfection. In order, therefore, to make a fair start in your newly undertaken life, you must know that this spirit of discretion is not a thing that can be evolved from yourself; it is to be sought for from your Spiritual Father. From his lips it must be learned. Hence, his counsels must be obeyed; and you yourself must undertake nothing that is either ordinary or extraordinary, without first applying to him for instruction.

But, in the age in which we live, indiscretion is not so much to be feared as is a spirit of too great discretion. For, far more numerous are those who, through false discretion, fall into lukewarmness, laxity, temptation, impurity, licentiousness, sacrilege, and apostasy than are those who fall through indiscretion. Hence it is that St. Theresa, over and over again, deplores the discretion which is visible in these our times.

Fourthly, in the beginning, you must be specially careful about small things; for, as you are yet but weak in virtue and without the courage necessary for undertaking great and heroic actions—recoiling, perhaps, at the very name “self-denial or mortification”—it is imperative that you should begin with that which is small, in order that by frequently exercising yourself in it, you may fit yourself for the execution of that which is great. For, small actions well done pave the way for the successful accomplishment

of those which are greater ; and small beginnings are oftentimes the germs of mighty works. Therefore, you must neglect nothing ; and as you are not courageous enough to attempt deeds of daring, be satisfied with the performance of less brilliant exploits. For, as St. Ambrose\* observes, "It is in slight skirmishes that we discover whether we have sufficient courage to go through a toughly contested battle."

Therefore, at first, direct your energy to the achievement of these small victories. You must, for instance, resolve to perform some slight acts of self-denial, saying : "My God ! for love of Thee, I will not gratify my curiosity by looking at this object ; I will not satisfy my sense of taste by eating this delicacy ; I will not make remarks which will draw to me the attention of others." By the frequent repetition of these and of similar acts, you will with the aid of God's grace prepare yourself to execute great and heroic deeds of virtue. In this care of small things may be included the observance of those rules which have reference to such matters as external deportment, religious propriety, and modesty ; for, although the essence of the Spiritual Life does not consist in them, yet they are both useful and necessary for laying a solid foundation on which that Life may be built. Anyone that contemptuously discards them will never become a truly religious man. For, an ancient Father of the desert used to say : "He who has no care to keep his outward man under due restraint, will never keep his inward man within proper limits."

Therefore, be specially careful to observe with the utmost exactitude, the rules of religious modesty and decorum ; not to act from natural impulse in anything that you either do or say ; or through giddiness, but through prudent foresight, mature deliberation, and on the suggestion of sound common-sense. In your dealings with your fellow-Novices and with others, avoid all buffoonery, rudeness, and unbecoming freedom either in word or in deed. Finally, observe that which our holy Father prescribes in the seventh, the sixty-third, and the seventy-second chapter of

\* *De Officiis*, lib. i., cap. x.



the Rule, to wit, reverence, kindness, and humility in your intercourse with others. To this we may add cleanliness and order in cell, wardrobe, desk, bed, and in all other things; so that nothing dirty, or ill-arranged, or out of place, may be seen in your little room.

Fifthly, you must avoid, as a most deadly poison, inordinate sadness, faint-heartedness, low spirits, and voluntary trouble of mind. These defects, under one pretext or another creep into the soul. They are seldom anything else than a snare, in which the devil strives to entangle the unwary, in order to make them either altogether throw up their religious calling or not to advance in solid virtue. Why should a Religious grieve and afflict himself, if he sincerely desires to serve God, and reflects on the happiness of his State? Oh, that you did but know and did but rightly esteem at its true value this gift of God bestowed on you, in preference to so many others! If you could but see the peril from which you have escaped and to which worldlings are exposed, you would in very deed exult and rejoice, and your joy no adversity, no misfortune would be able to take from you! Why are you so cowardly, so disturbed in mind, so dejected in heart? Is it because you frequently fall back into sin? Let not that discourage you! If you fall, speedily arise! If you fall ten times, why, ten times rise again! If you fall a hundred times, a hundred times rise again! If you fall a thousand times, a thousand times rise again! If, after repentance, you again commit the same faults; if your reason is clouded with darkness; if your soul grows languid; if your taste for spiritual things passes away; if your fervour cools; if your courage fails—even so, be not troubled; pluck up courage; renew your vigour; resolve to conquer, or to die in the struggle. That which opposes you will in the end give way before your persistent efforts, and you will be able to go forward with more ease, or at least you will die like a brave soldier, struggling and fighting to the last against your enemies.

Tranquillity of soul is a treasure of priceless worth; therefore, be wary lest the evil spirits who, like robbers, infest the

path to heaven should snatch the treasure from you. Trusting yourself unreservedly to the loving providence of God, accept from free, or from necessary, or from contingent causes, whatever adversity may befall you, just as if it had been ordained, or sent, or permitted from all eternity by Our good God; acknowledge that it has been most wisely, most holily, and most justly arranged for your true good; receive, acquiesce in, and with complete indifference—with a mind sweetly at peace, and confiding in the goodness of God—submit yourself to His most holy will and good pleasure. This thought is the fountain-head of all true and lasting peace of heart. Therefore, fix it immovably in your mind; act on the wisdom which it contains; and let your action pass into a habit and become the ordinary practice of your daily life.

Sixthly, you must flee from the commission of any deliberate sin, just as you would flee from the face of a serpent. Let there be no earthly evil for which you have a greater hatred than for the slightest offence against God. This is a matter of so great moment, that Lancelotti, a celebrated master of the Spiritual Life, thus writes of it: "The chief reason why so many after completing the Novitiate and joining the Community, begin deliberately to sin and to break the rules, is because they do not, from the Novitiate, carry with them a true knowledge of the enormity and the turpitude of sin; and, as an outcome of this knowledge, a hatred and a horror of it, which next to faith, constitute the very foundation, not only of the Religious, but of the secular life. They, on the other hand, who from the Novitiate bring with them this horror and this hatred of sin, live like perfect Religious; they observe every rule; they make rapid strides in the ways of God; they yield a complete obedience to Superiors; they live with others in a peaceful and edifying manner. Therefore, Novices ought to ground themselves well in this hatred of sin, if they really and truly desire to make any progress in virtue."

However, if up to the present time, owing to the merciful interposition of God's grace, your conscience does not reproach you with the guilt of any serious fault, do not, on

that account, allow yourself any greater liberty of action ; on the contrary, prove your gratitude to God, by carefully avoiding any deliberate sin, no matter how slight it may be. Also, endeavour to nourish in your heart a salutary fear of losing, in the very harbour of safety, that inestimable grace of God, which you have preserved while tossing about on the storm-swept ocean of a worldly life. Be mindful of that warning which is given by the Apostle: "Let him that thinketh himself to stand, take heed lest he fall."

If, however, owing to the sins of your youth, you cannot say, "My heart is clean," then, by a sincere confession, having rid yourself of your faults, endeavour now at least, and without delay, by the labour of obedience, to return to Him, from Whom you departed by the sloth of disobedience. "For, as you have yielded your members to serve uncleanness and iniquity unto iniquity, so now yield your members to serve justice unto sanctification."\* "As it was your mind to go astray from God, so when you return, you shall seek Him ten times as much."† Very similar to these words is St. John the Baptist's advice to the Sadducees and the Pharisees who had been guilty of so many sins: "Bring forth fruit worthy of penance." St. Gregory,‡ explaining this passage, says: "By these words, each of us is called upon to acquire, by means of penance, a harvest of good works, far more abundant than were the losses which he sustained by the commission of sin. Therefore, in proportion to the number of the unlawful acts which he performed, ought the number of the lawful acts to be, from which he will abstain." For, he who bears in mind that, for even one mortal sin, he would now be burning in the everlasting flames of hell, had not God, in His infinite mercy, given him time for repentance, will not shrink from any labour, or from any trial in the Religious Life which he has chosen to lead, precisely in order to satisfy God for the past and to serve Him more faithfully for the future; for, of a truth, the sufferings and the trials of this life fall immeasurably short of the least punishment of hell.

\* *Rom. vi. 19.*

† *Baruch vi. 28.*

‡ *Homil. xx. in Evang.*



## CHAPTER II

### THE NOVICE MASTER

#### SECTION I.

#### *Necessity for a Master.*

HAVING briefly explained the duties of the Novice immediately after his reception to the habit, our holy Father ordains that an Elder, or, as we say, a Novice-Master, should be appointed to watch over him, to give him the advantage of counsel and instruction, and thereby, with the aid of God's grace, to form him into a perfect man. In order thoroughly to explain this enactment of the Rule, let us first examine into the necessity for a Spiritual Master, and then into the duties of the Novice with respect to him.

Although daily experience affords ample proof of the necessity for a master's guidance in learning the arts and the sciences, yet it will not be out of place here to make this necessity even more manifest still, by reason and by authority; for, it may be that there are men so puffed up with pride and self-sufficiency, as to imagine that in the Spiritual Life they have not any need of a master. If there are any such, we commend the following pages to their careful reading and reflection; for, these men may hold it for a certainty that, unless they rid themselves of this notion, either they will not persevere in the path of holy Religion or they will not make any solid progress in virtue. They will live a most wretched life, in daily and in hourly danger of perishing miserably for all eternity. God Himself utters this and many other threats against those who are wise in their own conceit: "Woe to you that are wise in your own

eyes, and prudent in your own conceits ;” \* and be it observed that when the word “ woe ” is used in the Sacred Scripture, that expression foretells the advent of an accumulation not only of temporal but of eternal ills.

The first reason that proves the necessity for a Master is taken from the unanimous consent of those Fathers who lived in the early ages of the Church, and of those who have flourished in comparatively modern times. All these, without a single exception, are most vehement in their denunciation of those who, contemning the sage counsel of their Elders, desire to live according to the dictates of their own will, and, without the assistance of a guide, to tread the intricate paths of the Spiritual Life. Among a crowd of others anterior to himself, our holy Father St. Benedict considers that, for very many reasons Sarabites are the worst kind of Monks, which reasons it would be superfluous to mention, but chiefly for this one, that they live without a shepherd, shut up, not in Our Lord’s fold, but in their own ; having for their law their own desires ; deeming that to be holy which they either like or make choice of, but that to be unlawful which does not meet with their approbation.†

Hence it was a saying of the Monks of old : “ If you see a young man by his own will ascending to heaven, hold him by the feet ; drag him down and cast him to the earth ; for, such an ascent will profit him nothing.” These men, who had so wide an experience in the Spiritual Life, used to lay down as a first principle “ that no one should do anything relying on only his own judgment ; or should ever allow his mind to trust in its own wisdom ; or should ever think that he possesses a knowledge free from the danger of error, until he is loosed from the trammels of the flesh.” Let not any one imagine that this view is peculiar to the Fathers of antiquity who lived in times of so great sanctity and austerity, but that a milder and more considerate view must be adopted in these our times, when we have to deal with men of inferior sanctity and of less robust constitution. Any one so minded must remember that, if the times are changed, our Holy

\* *Isaias* v. 21.

† *Reg.*, cap. 1.

Rule remains the same, both in the afore-mentioned enactments and in those in which St. Benedict urges on us the necessity for self-denial and for full and complete dependence on the Abbot and the Elders ; for, he exacts from his disciples this abdication of self-will and this submission to the will of another, as the characteristic marks by which they are to be distinguished from the Sarabites and from the Gyrovagi, who are the worst kind of Monks.

Moreover, it must not be forgotten that, with respect to these matters, there is not any divergence of opinion between the Monks of ancient and the Monks of modern times. If it were desirable to adduce their testimony on this point, it would be found fully to corroborate the statement which we have made. However, let St. Bernard speak for all the rest, because with him all the spiritual writers of these our times are in most cordial agreement : " All ye who, being your own guides and teachers, fear not to enter the ways of the Spiritual Life, give an attentive ear to what I say. In the study of this holy art, you are at one and the same time both learners and teachers. How many such have been discovered to have most dangerously wandered from the right path ! For, through ignorance of Satan's wiles and stratagems, it came to pass that, whereas they began in the spirit, they have ended in the flesh and have fallen into most heinous crimes. Therefore, let those who are animated with a similar disposition see that they walk circumspectly ; let them imitate the prudence of the Spouse who would not go to Him whom her soul desired, until He had sent to her those whose guidance would lead her to her Beloved and teach her the fear of the Lord. He that will not have a teacher, gives his hand to the seducer ; and he who in the pastures leaves his sheep without a shepherd is not a feeder of the sheep, but a purveyor for the wolves."\*

The second reason which proves the necessity for a Master in the Spiritual Life, is the triple danger which lies in the path of virtue. In the first place, those who undertake to walk in that path are troubled with many harassing

\* *Sermo lxxvii. in Cantic.*



doubts ; they meet with snares which may entangle their feet ; there are ways which resemble the way of righteousness, and consequently they may very easily deceive and mislead the inexperienced. In the next place, this path is infested with robbers ; for, as St. Gregory says : “ While we are on the journey of life, with our faces turned towards our true home, the evil spirits beset our path, like so many robbers, ready to pounce out on us and despoil us of whatever treasures of virtue we may chance to possess.”\* Lastly, the path of virtue is long, and to tread its weary way is burthensome to flesh and blood. Hence it is that the traveller who, for the first time, enters it is filled with sadness, low spirits, fear, and disgust. Now, without the aid of a Spiritual Director, he will not be able to shake off these petty ills, or to escape from the serious dangers which spring from them. If, however, some such faithful monitor be at hand, that monitor will counsel him in doubt ; will point out the places in which the snare is set to entrap ; will help him over the opposing obstacles ; will teach him how to discriminate between the true and the false way ; will encourage him to meet and to vanquish his foes ; will support him in all his difficulties. Besides, as the Wise Man very well observes, “ it is better that two should be together than that there should be only one ;” for, they have the advantage of each other’s society ; if one fall, he will be raised by the other : “ Woe to him that is alone, for, when he falleth he hath none to lift him up ; and if a man prevail against one, two shall withstand him.”†

The third reason which proves the necessity for a Master for those who desire to reach perfection in solid virtue, is that this is the will of an all-wise God. For, although it is in His power to instruct men by means of Angels, or by internal inspirations, yet this is not His usual way. His will is that man should be taught by man. This is evident from the way in which God dealt with His chosen people and with His most illustrious servants. He might have instructed the Children of Israel either personally or by the intervention of

\* *Homil. xxii. in Evang.*

† *Eccles. iv. 9.*

an Angel; yet it was His pleasure that they should receive His teaching through his servant Moses. He might, personally, have instructed the Eunuch of Queen Candace; but He chose to send Philip, who interpreted for him the passage of the Prophet Isaias, which it chanced that the Eunuch was reading. When Saul was struck to the earth by the vision which he saw, on the way to Damascus, Christ Who then appeared to him, did not instruct the future Apostle as He might so easily have done. He sent to him Ananias. He warned the Centurion to call in St. Peter, and bade that noble soldier accept the Apostle as his teacher. Very apposite to the point of which we are at present treating, is the following incident, of which a detailed account may be found in the *Spiritual Meadow*.

An old Monk, who besides being a Monk was vested with the priestly dignity, was so favoured by Almighty God as to behold the angelic choirs who stand around in adoring awe, while the divine Mysteries are celebrating. It seems that he was one of those simple souls who are far richer in the endowments of grace than of worldly science; for, in his simplicity and ignorance, he so pronounced the words of the Liturgy as to give them, in a certain passage, an heretical meaning. A learned Deacon who assisted him in the Holy Sacrifice, pointed out to him this error, but to no purpose; for, the old man seeing that the Angels did not show any repugnance or any horror at his words, would not believe that he had been guilty of any mistake. But when the Deacon over and over again urged him to rectify his error, the old man determined to test the truth of the Deacon's words, by asking the Angels whether that which the Deacon had said was true. He did so; and they answered that the Deacon had counselled him aright. "Why, then," said he, in great surprise, "did you not correct me?" "Because," replied one of the Angels, "it is God's ordinance that men should be corrected by men." Hence, we may learn from this answer the necessity for submitting ourselves to the guidance of a Spiritual Master, if we do not wish to oppose the divine will.

The practice of the Church in all ages even to our own times, furnishes the fourth reason which shows the necessity for a Master. For, from that practice, it is evident that not only Religious, but laymen desirous of greater perfection, are in the habit of asking the advice of others concerning the ways of the Spirit and of making use of others as masters and guides, in order to escape falling into error, and thus to be able more easily and more speedily to attain to perfection. To say nothing of the crowd of witnesses whom we might call to testify unto the truth of this, consult the Holy Rule, and you will there see what a high value St. Benedict attaches to dependence in all things on our Superiors and our Elders; to subjection to their orders and wishes; to candour in all our dealings with them. Especially is this esteem for such dependence made manifest by his command that, over the Novices there should be appointed a Master skilled in the art of winning souls to God. The duty of this Master is with all care to watch over them. Now, why is this? Because St. Benedict who, as St. Gregory says, was full of the spirit of all the Just, saw most clearly that no one, and especially that no Novice, is sufficient for himself, but that it is necessary for him to submit himself to, and to learn from a Spiritual Master. Therefore, we may with reason address to you the words which Tobias addressed to his son: "Never suffer pride to reign in thy mind, or in thy words; for, from pride all perdition took its beginning."\* Oh, from how many snares of the devil would men have escaped, had they but given themselves up to the guidance of a Master in the Spiritual Life!

## SECTION II.

*Of the Love, Esteem, and Confidence which a Novice ought to show to his Master.*

After proving the necessity for a Spiritual Master, we may now proceed to point out your duties to him, in order that, from the knowledge of these duties and from the

\* Tobias iv. 14.



faithful discharge of them, you may draw from his guidance and direction the advantages which they are intended to secure for you. Let us, then, in the present section, confine our attention to three of these duties—namely, love, esteem, and confidence.

Your love for your Master ought to resemble that of a child for his father; for, the chief care of the Master is directed to the spiritual life, to the supernatural good of your soul. You must, however, take care that this love does not degenerate into a merely human, natural affection; for, in that case, one of these two things will happen: either it will not last, or, if it do, it will not be of any use in advancing your perfection. The reason is that love, being the foundation on which all your duties with respect to your Master chiefly rest, it will follow that if your love be a merely human love, that love will have no other strength than that of human nature; and all your duties resting, of necessity, on this slender reed, must in consequence be ever subject to change and to imperfection; hence they will never be productive in your soul of any solid, lasting good. Furthermore, St. Benedict insists on this love being *sincere* and *humble*. Now, a *sincere* love is one in which there is not any admixture of dissimulation or of flattery, or any corrupting influence of fear or of hope, but it is given to him who is the object of it, only for God's sake. Besides being sincere, your love must be *humble*; for, if it have not this quality, either it will speedily change into boldness and contempt, or it will cause you to forget your spiritual indigence and your position as a Novice in the science of salvation.

Secondly, in order that you may have a high esteem of your master, you must not regard him as a mere man; you must accustom yourself to look on him as holding the place of God. By this means, your esteem for him and the outward and the inward reverence which are the result of it, will never be diminished, even though he be full of defects and destitute of those natural qualities which usually compel respect. It is a very great mistake on the part of those who present themselves as Novices to a Religious Order, to

have their eyes wide open to the movement, the actions, and the habits of their Master, in order to pick out his defects, to blame them, to sit in judgment on them, and to make them the subject of jesting and of merriment in the Common Room. Those who are guilty of this conduct give an evident proof that they have lost all reverence for the director of their souls, all taste for the things of God, and that they savour only the gross, rank, fleshly things of earth, in punishment of which perverted taste, as well as of the insult offered, not to man, but to God Himself represented by His vicar, God will not suffer them to reap any fruit from the direction of their Master; but there will fall on them that retributive justice of which Isaias speaks: "Woe to thee that despisest; shalt not thou thyself also be despised? When being wearied thou shalt cease to despise, thou shalt be despised."\*

Thirdly, you must have full confidence in your Master. According to St. Thomas, this confidence is nothing else than the trust which one man puts in another who is kindly disposed towards him, when he reflects that this other is able and willing to help him. Therefore, bear in mind that you have not a more faithful friend, or one who is more solicitous for your eternal welfare, than your Master is; consequently, setting aside all natural and human considerations, you should be most firmly persuaded that the merciful providence of God has designed this man to be the instrument for securing your salvation and for perfecting you in the ways of the Spirit. Hence, if with a sincere heart and for God's sake you seek his advice; if you believe the advice which he gives you and courageously carry it out in act, not only you will not suffer any harm, but God will so order matters that everything will work together for you unto good, even though your Master may not have all those natural good qualities that grace the minds of other men. Experience will prove to those who follow this counsel, that what has been said is not a mere piece of pious exaggeration; whereas, on the other hand, those who, measuring all

\* Cap. xxxiii. 1.

things by natural reason, will not trust themselves to be directed by any one that has not great intellectual ability, either will never find a man who, according to them, is capable of directing them, and therefore, being left to themselves, they will be miserably deceived ; or, if they do succeed in discovering some one who comes up to their lofty ideal, yet, through their own unworthiness, they will derive more harm than good from his direction, since they do not deserve to be cared for by God, in that special way in which He attends to the welfare of those who trust themselves to the guidance of His vicars or rather of Himself, and who are safely conducted, through the midst of perils innumerable, to the much-desired bourne of eternal happiness.

### SECTION III.

#### *Of the Novice's Candour with respect to his Master.*

Among the sage precepts which Tobias gave to his son, we find this excellent piece of advice : " Seek counsel always of a wise man." \* This accords very well with that which is spoken by Ecclesiasticus : † " My son, do nothing without counsel, and thou wilt not repent when thou hast done." You should put both these precepts in practice, by often consulting your Master and by never doing anything without first having sought his advice. In order to render these consultations profitable, you must lay open your very soul before his eyes, just as a sick man who sends for a physician, exposes to him all his ills, in order by this means the more effectually to obtain the physician's skilful aid. It would, therefore, ill become a Religious to do less for his soul's health than men of the world are ready to do for the health and the well-being of the body. Consequently, your conscience ought to be as transparent as crystal beneath the eye of your Spiritual Father ; nothing that lies within your conscience should be hidden from him ; he must know it better than you yourself know it. Do not wait for him to

\* Cap. iv. 19.

† Cap. xxxii. 24.



ask leave to inspect it ; when you find him at liberty, humbly beg him to suffer you to lay it open before him. By being secret and silent, you will invite the attack of the devil ; therefore, hide not from your director the first suggestions by which the evil spirit may strive to insinuate his poison unto your heart. To conceal these suggestions is a serious fault in a Novice ; it is the first stone of the devil's palace in his soul ; it is the first step towards lukewarmness, unrest, ruin ; a lurking-place in which the evil one will lie concealed. Therefore, be candid, outspoken with your Superior, even though he may dislike you ; for, if he be harsh and strict with you, he will effect more good in you than one who is gentle and indulgent. This candour with respect to your Master is so necessary, and it ought to be so characteristic of a Novice, that there is scarcely any other quality that should be more earnestly urged on your notice. It will supply for the absence of many other qualities ; in fact, it is, perhaps, of all others the most desirable. With good reason do we say this ; for, since the Novice is, as a rule, ignorant of and inexperienced in spiritual things, keenly alive to every movement of the sensitive appetite, unskilled in the wiles of the devil, unable to rein in the impetuosity of the passions, incapable of discriminating between leprosy and leprosy, between good and evil, between spirit and spirit, caring more for the external trappings of Religious Life than for its hidden virtues, still hankering after the fleshpots of Egypt, incapable of reaching to lofty virtues, prone to earthly and to sensual things, and, though full of the best intentions, yet wanting in that wisdom which would carry those intentions into effect,—since he is thus hampered with difficulties, we consider that there cannot be any proceeding more safe, any line of conduct more advisable, than that he should seek from the hands of another that which he himself does not possess. Thus it will come to pass that he who, on account of the child-like weakness of his spiritual man, is scarcely able to totter along, procures the aid of another, on whose shoulders he is borne forward ; by whose advice he is guided ; whose commands he obeys ; whose

foresight provides for him; and whose will carries into effect, on his behalf, that which is right. This in a very special manner is a privilege which is found in Religious Life, in which the Superior is, in so peculiar a way, the vicar of God and the sure interpreter of God's will, that his sentiments are God's sentiments; his will is God's will with respect to the individual good of each Religious; for, God has promised to manifest His will, by the instrumentality of Superiors, to all that are living under obedience. There is no lack of examples to corroborate this statement; but of these we will adduce only two, in order to point out the danger of not being open and outspoken with your spiritual guides.

It is related in the Chronicles of the Franciscan Order that St. Antony of Padua once admitted into the Brotherhood a certain Novice who, at his reception, did not lay open before the Saint his whole heart. He was secret and reticent. Grievous temptations to go back into the world began to assail him, but of these he said nothing. At last he could not endure his state of misery any longer; he made up his mind to flee from the Monastery. A favourable opportunity for so doing presented itself, of which he took advantage; and, turning his back on the cloistral life, quitted the abode of peace. At the gate he found a splendid horse gaily caparisoned, bearing well-filled saddle-bags containing arms, clothes, and money. He eagerly seized on these, mounted, and galloped off with all speed. On his journey, he put up at an Inn, and, while staying there, he was smitten by the beauty of the Innkeeper's daughter. He asked her in marriage of her father; he was accepted as a son-in-law and he went through the ceremony of marriage. On the very night of the hurried nuptials, a stranger presented himself at the Inn and said to the host: "Your newly-acquired son-in-law is a Monk. If you doubt my words, steal up softly to his room, uncover his head, and you will see by his shaven crown that I have spoken the truth." Full of wrath at having been so egregiously deceived, the father-in-law crept up to the chamber, uncovered the head of the unhappy Monk, and, on seeing

his tonsure, in a paroxysm of rage, cut the young man's throat. Then, wishing to console himself for the disgrace which had befallen his house, he went forthwith to take possession of the horse, the arms, and the money, which the Novice, when pressing his suit, had shown to him. But the noble steed had gone; there were not any arms; there was not any money! Full of terror at this discovery, and seeing plainly that he had been cheated by the devil, he went to St. Antony, and related to him the various events just as they had occurred. The Saint perceived the devil's work in this horrible tragedy and bitterly mourned the death of the unhappy Novice, who by Satan's wiles had been seduced, betrayed, and most cruelly destroyed. Thus, the refusal to be open with his Superiors brought about the ruin of this wretched Religious. Let his fate be a warning to others not to have any secrets in their conscience, hidden away from the eyes of their Spiritual Father; for, that Novice would never have met with this awful death had he manifested his temptations to St. Antony.

Another Novice who was living in the same secret manner in which the preceding Novice had lived, was, by the intercession of St. Antony, happily saved from a similar disaster. It appears that the Saint had in his possession a Book of Psalms which roused all the cupidity of the poor Novice's soul. He wished to have the volume, and, through this wish, the temptation came to his soul to become master of it by theft. Though harassed by this thought, he did not reveal it to the Saint. At last, yielding to the seduction of the devil, he stole the book and fled with it from the Monastery. St. Antony speedily discovered that the Monk had gone and that the book had disappeared with him. Therefore, falling on his knees, he prayed most earnestly that God would touch the heart of the youth and lead him back to a better frame of mind. Our good Lord listened to the prayer of His holy servant. He filled the heart of the Novice with so great remorse that he returned, and delivered to the Saint the book with which he had fled, saying: "As I ran from the Monastery, and as I was about to cross the



river by the bridge, a most horrible demon stood in my path, and by his threatening aspect compelled me to return hither." Therefore, whenever the soul of a Novice is troubled with any secret cause of unrest, let him straightway lay open his conscience before his Spiritual Father and from him seek a remedy; for, delay only increases the danger and hurries men into sin.

In order to aid you in making this manifestation of conscience, we will briefly put before you both the matter which may be the subject of it, and the manner in which the disclosure ought to be made. First, with respect to the matter. This may comprise not only your temptations, passions, evil inclinations, and "the faults which you have either secretly or openly committed,"\* but also your good inclinations, virtuous practices, success in meditation, profit from spiritual reading—in fact, everything that pertains to the internal state of the soul, or to the external condition of the body—such as are health, mortifications, and the like. To aid you in making this manifestation, we subjoin a few questions, the answers to which will contain almost everything that may constitute the matter of it.

1. Are you really contented with, and do you highly esteem your Religious Calling?

2. What difficulties, temptations, propensities, have you with respect to the observance of vows, of stability, and of amendment of manners?

3. Is there anything that disturbs, or afflicts, or tortures your mind?

4. What difficulties do you experience with respect to rules, prescribed duties, choir, solitude, silence, acts of humility, of patience, and the rest?

5. What advantage or what disadvantage do you receive from common life and from intercourse with your brethren? Have you any sympathy for or any antipathy to any one? Are you of a contentious spirit? Do you feel any difficulty in bearing with the moral or with the physical defects and infirmities of others?

\* *Reg.*, cap. vii.

6. To what occupations, pursuits, books, do you feel yourself most forcibly drawn?

7. To what virtues do you feel yourself most inclined, and to the practice of which you receive most frequent calls and inspirations?

8. Towards what vices are you most inclined, and concerning which you experience most temptations?

9. Of what bodily mortifications do you make most frequent use? To what practices of piety do you feel drawn?

10. How do you spend your free time?

11. What progress have you made in the prayer of meditation; what advantage do you reap from spiritual reading, from your general and your particular examination of conscience, from confession and from Holy Communion? What difficulties do you find in each of these and what obstacles hinder you from gathering fruit from them?

12. Lastly, what is the state of your bodily health?

After having considered the *matter* of the manifestation, let us now examine into the *manner* in which it ought to be made.

It must be made with a pure and upright intention—that is to say, you must have in view only self-humiliation before God and before His vicar; instruction in your duties; and the help which is to be gained from those who have had experience in the ways of God. Far be it from you to allow any other motive to influence you, such as going through this action, because it is the custom, because Superiors wish it, and because you will thereby either win their favour or acquire a little vain glory. All the fruit of this practice depends on the good intention with which it is performed. The more pure that intention is, the more abundant will be the harvest of fruit which springs from it.

You must first invoke the aid of God in order thoroughly to know yourself and, knowing yourself, to suffer yourself to be known by your Spiritual Father precisely as you are. In the next place, your prayer must be, that light may be given

to your Superiors to guide you aright for your greater profit and for the glory of God. Your manifestation of conscience must be made with deep humility; for, if you be animated with this, you will not fear to cover yourself with well-merited confusion. As for those advantages which you possess in consequence of God's exceedingly great bounty, to Him only let there be given the honour and the glory which may accrue to you from their possession. For, humility such as this is productive of immense good, and although the practice of it goes very much against the grain of our corrupt nature, yet all repugnance must be generously overcome in the hope of a heavenly reward. Experience will prove to him who, by constant practice, has made humility his own, that, together with it, he has acquired all other good things. Therefore, do not mar the excellence of this virtue by hiding from your Spiritual Father, through false shame, any of your defects or your sins, or by aiming at vain glory in manifesting the favours which have been granted to you by God; for, take notice that, without humility, all things else are worthless. Yet you must not, on account of temptations to vain glory, omit your manifestation of conscience; for, it is a part of the devil's cunning to keep some men from discovering their hidden selves, through a species of false shame, and to hinder others who are quite willing to do it, by a fear of vain glory. Beware of yielding to his suggestions; act in direct opposition to them; protest that you lay open your conscience to your Spiritual Father for no other reason and with no other intention, than with those of pleasing Almighty God and of learning His holy will. Having made this protest, treat the devil's temptations with the contempt which they deserve and, with all simplicity of heart, make your manifestation of conscience as usual. Lastly, be ready to follow the advice which is given to you by your Spiritual Father; for, on a temper of mind like this the fruit of the manifestation in great measure depends. But of this we will treat more at large in the following section.



## SECTION IV.

*On the Novice's Obedience to his Master in Imitation of the Obedience of Christ.*

The last duty of a good Novice, with respect to his Master, is obedience. This duty may be called the key-stone of all the rest. If it is wanting, they are useless. It is because of the great importance of obedience that you are counselled to love your Master, highly to esteem him, to confide in him, and to open your heart to him ; for, if you act thus, you will with great promptitude obey him and carry into effect whatever he may judge useful and necessary for your spiritual perfection : “for, not the *hearers* of the Law are just before God ; but the *doers* of the Law shall be justified.”\*

Obedience must be the fruit of all that we have taught concerning your duty towards your Master ; for, as St. Ambrose says : “The Master's fruit is the obedience shown to him by his scholars.”† Therefore, give an attentive ear to that which our holy Father says in the Prologue to his Rule : “Hearken, my Son, to the precepts of thy Master, and incline the ear of thy heart willingly to hear, and effectually to accomplish the admonition of thy loving Father ;” for, in these words are contained the three conditions without which the sweet fruit of obedience will never be gathered by you.

In the first place, the words of your Master are to be heard not only with the ears of the body, but with the ears of the mind. Therefore, when you seek and obtain advice and counsel from your Master, you must take care that your mind is not filled with distracting thoughts. These, as well as everything else that is a cause of trouble to you, must be set aside, and your whole mind be given to catch the words of God's vicar who speaks to you. In the next place, you must bring with you a mind ready and willing to believe that which is told to you. Those persons are guilty of a grievous error who accept their Master's instructions only when these

\* Rom. ii. 13.

† In 1 Thess. i.

are not repugnant to their own judgment. On this subject listen to that which St. Ephrem says: "If anything should seem to you to be good, and that thing is not accounted good by your Master, believe him in the Lord." For, to be contentious and obstinate in maintaining one's own opinion, is a sign of a speedy fall. Lastly, you must follow the admonitions and the counsels of your Master. If you do this, you will taste and see how sweet is the yoke of the Lord. To you will happen that which in vision befell St. John when he had received the book from the hand of the Angel and had, according to the Angel's instructions, eaten it. It was sweet as honey in his mouth.

In order to stir up within yourself a still greater desire to carry out the counsels which, in this chapter, have been given to you, fix your eyes on the example put before you by the Apostles who, leaving all things, gave themselves up wholly to Jesus Christ, to be by Him instructed and formed to virtue. How great, how humble, how sincere was their love of their Master! How profound was their esteem of Him, how unbounded was their reverence! It was so great that they feared not openly to confess Him and everywhere to show Him honour. How full of confidence was their recourse to Him in all emergencies; how childlike and unvarnished was the history which they gave to Him of everything that they had done during His absence. Finally, how insatiable was their thirst, how inextinguishable was their desire to hear His lessons of heavenly wisdom, and how ardent was their zeal to conform their lives with its maxims! All this is so well known to him who shall even superficially have read the pages of Sacred Scripture, that no words of ours are needed to prove it further. Therefore, fix your eyes on these disciples of Our Lord, and learn how you are properly to conduct yourself in your intercourse with your Master. Take notice of the honour and the glory which they merited by their close imitation of Jesus—they themselves after His ascension became the masters and teachers of the world. However, there was one exception even among them—the traitor Judas, who did not wholly

give himself up to the guidance of his Master. He held that Master's person, doctrine, and example in hatred and contempt. He avoided His company. He tried to deceive Him by pretence and by dissimulation. He turned a deaf ear to His most loving warnings and counsels. At last, when his treachery had excluded him from the Apostolic College, he laid violent hands on himself, and died a most horrible death. His fate is a warning of fearful import to those who, in a certain measure, imitate his conduct, by not suffering themselves to be guided by their Master's counsels. You may, perchance, be urged to object: "But my case is far different. Had I the same Master that the Apostles served, I would with exactitude and joy carry out His every desire. I would, with all the powers of my being, love and esteem Him. But how can I intrust my conscience and my salvation to a man gifted with so little wisdom and full of so many imperfections, as I perceive *my* Master to have?" Let the learned Gerson answer this objection: "Whoever thou art that dost speak and reason in this fashion, thou art foolish and guilty of a grave error. For, it is not because any given man is prudent, learned, and devout, that thou hast intrusted both thyself and thy salvation to his hand; but because he is set over thee by the ordinance of the Rule to be thy Superior and thy Prelate. Therefore, in obeying him, it is not man that thou art obeying, but, as long as the Superior's commands are in accordance with the Law of God, it is God that thou art obeying. In fact, the less worthy of thy esteem is the Superior whom thou dost obey, the more pleasing to God and the more fruitful to thyself, will thy obedience be; because it is not on account of the Superior's merit that thou dost obey him, but on account of thy love of God Whom the Superior is supposed to represent. To the last, however, be on thy guard, lest while thou seekest and thou dost not find that security which thou desirest, thou shouldst fall into the snare of rash judgment and presumption."\*

\* *De præp. ad Missam., conf. 3.*



## SECTION V.

*St. Dorotheus on the Abandonment of our own Judgment.*

By way of conclusion to this chapter, it will be to your advantage that we should give, word for word, the teaching of St. Dorotheus on the necessity for a Spiritual Master, and on the duties owing to that Master from the scholars who are under his guidance.

“The Wise Man, in the Book of Proverbs says: ‘Where there is no governor the people shall fall; but there is safety where there is much counsel.’\* Consider, my Brethren, all the wisdom that lies within the compass of these few words; and mark well the lesson which they convey. They warn us not to be our own teachers; not to think that we are wise; not to believe that we are capable of governing ourselves. For, we need help from others; we need those who, under God, may direct us aright.

“Nothing can be more wretched, nothing more open to errors without number, than is the state of those who have not any guide in the ways of God. For, ‘they who have no governor shall fall like leaves.’ In the early spring the leaves are fresh, green, delightful; but when they wither and fall, they are contemned and trodden under foot. A similar fate is in store for those who are not governed by any one. At first they are fervent in fasting, in watching, in recollection, and in every other good work; but by degrees the fire of their fervour cools, and if there be not at hand a Master to add fresh fuel to it, and to fan the fire into vigorous life, that fire will die out. Then they will be seized by their enemies who will do with them what they please.

“But of those who renounce their own will and do all things with the advice of others, it is said: ‘There is safety where there is much counsel.’ By these words, the Wise Man does not mean us to understand that we should take advice of some one man, but that we should *frequently* do this; that we should put complete trust in him; that we

\* *Prov. xi. 14.*

should conceal nothing from him; that we should let him know not merely *some* things, but *all* things; and that in all these things we should seek his advice. In this way there is safety in *much* counsel. For, unless we lay open everything before the eyes of our Director, particularly if we chance to be under the spell of some evil habit, or to be labouring under the disadvantage of a faulty education, the devil will discover in us some one wish, or some one virtue, and by it will effect our downfall. For, when Satan perceives that a man is averse from evil, he is not so unskilled in the knowledge of the human heart as to urge that man to commit some evidently wicked thing. He never says: 'Go, indulge your passions in uncleanness. Steal that valuable article from such or such a one.' He is well aware that our will is not inclined towards these things, and consequently he does not propose to us that for which we have not any desire. But he discovers, as we have said, either that we have some one wish, or that we do some good work, and under the pretext of that good work he inflicts on us a deadly wound.

"Hence, in another place it is said: 'The wicked one acts wickedly when he mingles justice with his designs.' This wicked one is the devil, and then especially does he act wickedly, perversely, when he mixes himself up with our justice. For, then it is that he is more powerful, that his stroke is more hurtful, that he is able to act with more telling effect. For, when we have the misfortune to get our own way, and to plume ourselves on our own justice, then it is that we set snares for ourselves; we think that we are doing good, and we know not by what means it is that we perish. For, how is it possible either that we should seek or that we should know the good pleasure of God, while we believe in ourselves and trust to our own will? Of this self-will the Abbot Pastor used to say: 'It is a wall of brass between man and God.' Again; 'It is a rebounding rock, because it is contrary and repugnant to the divine will.' But if a man give up self-will, he will be able to say: 'In God I shall pass over the wall; my God, His way is unde-

filed.' Of a truth, the holy Abbot spoke these words with good reason ; for, then only does a man see that the way of God is without spot, when he gives up his own will ; but so long as he yields to self-will he perceives not this way. Against those who advise him not to yield to self-will, he murmurs bitterly. In his heart he contradicts and despises them. How can it be otherwise ; for, the obstinate and headstrong man will not suffer any one to gainsay his opinion ; he will not accept any advice."

Speaking of a blameless life, the same holy Abbot says : " If such a life is joined with self-will, the man who is leading it is not living well. This sounds and reads very like a paradox. But, in very truth, the death of sin is found wherever what is called a blameless life is conjoined with self-will. Great is the peril of this union ; fearful is the dread arising from that which may be the result of it. For, in these circumstances, the wretched, self-willed man falls once and for ever. For, who can persuade him to believe that any one knows better than he himself does that which is beneficial to him ? He gives himself over to do his own will and to follow his own judgment. It is then an easy matter for the devil to trip him up and to cast him down headlong. Therefore, it is written : ' The wicked one acts wickedly, perversely, when he mingles justice with his acts.' He hates the very word ' caution.' The writer says not only that the wicked one hates caution, but that he cannot bear to hear even its name. Nay, worse still, he hates the very sound by which the idea of caution is by the senses conveyed to the mind. If, for example, anything is said to advise caution,—as for instance : ' Before you undertake any important matter, make inquiries for safety's sake,' he hates the very fact that any one should make inquiries of another and should hear anything that may contribute to his well-being. He hates, he is averse from the very sound of these words.

" What is the reason of this ? It is because he is well aware that his own cunning is discovered by the replies which are given to the questions put to Directors, and by



conversations held with them for the purpose of gaining information. Now, there is nothing that he holds in more utter abomination, nothing that he fears more than the fact of being made known. For, when he is known, he has not any longer anything wherewith to lay snares for the objects of his hate. Hence, if the soul be fortified against all attack, because it openly confesses its necessities and miseries; and if, in consequence of this confession, it have the privilege of hearing from the lips of an intelligent and wary man: 'Do this, do not do that; this is good, that is not good; this is justice, that is self-will;' at one time, 'this is not the occasion for doing this,' at another, 'now is the right moment for action,' the devil will be able neither to hurt nor to cast it down; because it is always guided aright and protected on every side. Hence that saying of the Proverbs is verified in its regard: 'There is safety in much counsel.' The malignant devil, however, does not at all relish this; he hates it. He wishes to be malignant and rejoices in those 'who have no governor.' Why does he rejoice? Because they fall like autumnal leaves.

"Consider well the history of that Monk, of whom the devil said to the Abbot Macarius: 'There is a certain Brother who, at my will, shifts about like a weathercock.' Such as he are loved by the evil spirit; over them he exults and rejoices, because they have not any guide and expose not their necessities to him who, after God, is able to give them assistance. When the holy man saw the wicked spirit going about among the Brethren, offering his allurements to them, he noticed that he did not go to all. From those who, when tempted, were in the habit of at once hastening to the Superior and of laying open their temptations before him, the evil one kept aloof, and over them he obtained not any power. But that wretched Brother whom he discovered to be acting as his own Master and to be seeking aid from no one, him he accosted and of him made a plaything. To him he gave thanks as he departed, but heaped imprecations on the heads of the rest. As soon as the Abbot Macarius had learnt this from the devil, he straightway went to the

Brother, and, after conversing with him for some time, discovered that this self-reliance was, in very truth, the cause of his fall. For, he would not confess ; he would not manifest the state of his conscience. On this account the devil was able to turn him whithersoever he pleased. The holy Abbot addressing the unfortunate man, said : ‘ My Brother, how fares it with you ? ’ ‘ Father,’ he replied, ‘ owing to your good prayers, very well ! ’ ‘ Are you molested by any temptation ? ’ ‘ Up to the present time, all is well.’ He would not confess. At last the holy Abbot succeeded in persuading him to disclose the state of his soul and thereby wrought in him a thorough conversion.

“ When the evil spirit again came to this Brother, to cast him into sin, he found him firmly rooted in his fixed resolve. It was impossible to move him. The devil, therefore, fled away unsuccessful and covered with confusion. St. Macarius, seeing that evil spirit once again among the Brethren, asked him : ‘ How fares it with your friend ? ’ ‘ Friend ! ’ he cried ; ‘ call him not my friend, he is my enemy ! I hate him ; for, now he also is perverse. He believes me not ; he is even more hostile to me than the rest are.’ This is why our foe hates those who are cautious. But he loves those who lean on themselves, because they help him ; they are a snare unto themselves.

“ Mark well this fact : no Monk ever falls away from his holy calling, unless it is by trusting his own heart. Some men will assign one reason for his fall and some another ; but if you take the trouble to investigate the matter, you will find that it is owing to his confidence in himself. Do you know any one that has fallen ? Then you may be sure that he has been his own director. There is not any step more dangerous, any step more fatal, than to take on one’s self that perilous office.

“ God in His infinite goodness has always preserved me from that misfortune. When I was in the Monastery, I always manifested my conscience to the Abbot John. For, I never presumed to do anything without consulting him. It happened on one occasion that I said to myself : ‘ Are you

going to make known this circumstance to the Abbot? Why are you so troublesome to him?' Forthwith I replied: 'Anathema to thee and to thy judgment! Anathema to thy understanding, to thy prudence, and to thy knowledge! for, that which thou hast is from the devil.' I used then to go to the Abbot and ask his advice; and it sometimes happened that he told me precisely that which I myself had thought. Then I said to myself: 'This is just what I myself might have known and I have been uselessly troubling the Abbot.' But to this I made answer: 'Although you yourself might have thought the very same thing, yet that opinion would have been from yourself; but now it is from the Holy Spirit; therefore, it is good. For, that which is your own is evil; it comes from the devil; it is swayed by passion.' By acting thus, I never put any faith in my own thoughts; I always consulted those persons who were placed in authority over me.

"Believe me, Brethren, in consequence of acting thus, I lived in so great peace and tranquillity that, as I have often before told you, I became alarmed about my state; for, I had heard that, by many tribulations, we must enter the kingdom of God, and, looking on myself, I saw that I was free from them. Therefore was I fearful and full of anxious dread; for, I knew not the cause of this unbroken repose. At last the holy Abbot told me that I need not be disturbed on account of the peace in which I lived; for, that the security and the rest which I enjoyed are the rewards bestowed on those who give themselves up to be guided by obedience. Therefore, my Brethren, make it a rule to seek counsel and never to trust to yourselves. If you follow this advice you will know by experience what great safety, joy, and repose of spirit are to be found by complying with it. However, as I have told you that I was not subject to any affliction, listen to that which in this respect befell me.

"While I was living in the Monastery, an exceedingly great and intolerable sadness took possession of me. I was in so great straits and grief in consequence of it, that it seemed to me impossible that I should live. All this, however, arose from the machinations of the devil. The trial



was, indeed, a very severe one, though it lasted but a short time. A trial full of trouble, darksome, without one consoling thought to cheer, without one moment of repose, without a respite from the load which at once crushed me to the earth and stifled me. The grace of God, however, speedily refreshed my soul, otherwise I should most certainly have despaired. For, one day while I was thus so sorely tried and pressed on every side, I happened to be standing in the quadrangle of the Monastery. I was praying to God about this trouble which was oppressing me, when, raising my eyes and looking towards the Church, I beheld a man clad in episcopal robes enter the sanctuary, as if about to celebrate Mass. Although I never without necessity accosted any guest, yet, on this occasion, something impelled me to follow him. For a considerable space of time he stood before the altar, praying with outstretched arms; and standing behind him, I also prayed with much fear and trembling; for, his appearance filled me with terror.

“When he had ended his prayer, he turned and came towards me. As he approached, the load of fear which weighed on me was lifted and cast aside. When he stood before me, he put forth his hand, and touching my breast with his finger, said: ‘With expectation I have waited for the Lord and He was attentive to me; He heard my prayer and brought me out of the pit of misery and the mire of dregs; He set my feet upon a rock and directed my steps; He put a new canticle into my mouth, a song to Our God.’\* These verses of the Psalm he repeated three times and then departed. From that moment light broke in on my hitherto darkened soul; joy, consolation, and sweetness welled up within me; I became quite another man. Hastening after him, I could nowhere find him. He had disappeared. By the mercy of God, I have not been troubled, from that hour till this present moment, with sadness or with fear. God has protected me from them, through the prayers of that holy man. I have spoken thus to you that you may see and understand the peaceful repose and tranquillity which are the lot of those who do not undertake to guide themselves, but

\* Ps. xxxix. 2, 4.

who put all their trust in God and in those who are able to guide them in His ways.

“Therefore, Brethren, learn to ask for counsel and not to trust in yourselves. Your true good is humility; it is tranquillity; it is joy. Why should any one fret and trouble himself to no purpose? It is impossible for any one to be saved except in this way! But some one will say: ‘What will he do who has not any one from whom to seek advice?’ I answer: ‘If any one truly and with his whole heart desire to do the will of God, God will not abandon him; He will guide him according to His own divine will.’ Of a truth, if any one turn his heart to do the will of God, that merciful Father will enlighten even a little child to point out that which He would have him do. But if any man do not truly wish for the will of God, even though in his perversity he go to a prophet and seek from him guidance and light, yet God will inspire the heart of the prophet what to answer him, according to that: ‘If he shall err, and a prophet shall have spoken, I the Lord have made that prophet to err.’ Therefore, you ought with all your strength to direct your will unto God and not to trust to your own heart. But if anything is good, and you hear from a holy man that it is good, you ought to look on it as undoubtedly good. Yet you ought not by any means to believe that you do that thing well and in the way in which it ought to be done. You ought, indeed, to do it to the best of your ability; and then to explain in what way you do it, in order to learn whether you have done it well or ill. Yet, even so, you must not lay aside all care; you must await the judgment of God. For, as the holy man Agatho used to say when any one asked him: ‘Father, do you also fear?’ ‘Up to the present time, indeed, I have done the best that I was able. Yet, I know not whether my actions have pleased God. For, the judgment of God is one thing; that of men is very different.’ May God preserve us from the danger which is incurred by those persons who rest on their own judgment. May He make us worthy to walk in the footsteps of our Fathers who have been pleasing unto Him.”

## CHAPTER III

### OF TRULY SEEKING GOD

#### SECTION I.

#### *Truly Seeking God.*

As we have already, in the "Postulant," treated at sufficient length of this and of the other three qualities of a good Novice, we will here omit certain matters which are there dealt with; but there are certain others which we will take the liberty to glance at once again, in order that they may make a deeper and more lasting impression on your mind. Truly to seek God is a matter of importance so vital that on it, in reality, the repose and the happiness, both temporal and eternal, of Religious Orders and of Religious men chiefly depend. Hence, we deem it necessary to dwell at greater length on this subject, in order that by thoroughly understanding and duly appreciating it, you may not, in this respect, presume to do anything that is rash, or inconsiderate, or evil, or tainted with the spirit of lukewarmness; for, it would redound to your own great loss as well as to the detriment of Religion in general. In order, therefore, at the very outset to hinder all mistakes, we must first lay before you the principal ones which, under this head, may creep into your conduct, and then point out to you the best way to correct them.

The first mistake is to seek, in Religious Life, anything else than God. The second is to profess to seek God, and yet not to do it in the way in which it ought to be done. Those persons are guilty of the first mistake who come to Religious Life, not by the divine impulse and calling, but



through the enticements of flattering promises, or through the terror of threats. Others come to the Monastery of their own accord, indeed, but with a view to their own advantage. If they had remained in the world, they would, perhaps, have had scarcely sufficient wherewith to support a wretched state of existence. In the Monastery they find a good table; they are respectably clad; and they have many comforts which otherwise they would never have had. Of such as these we may say, with the Apostle: "Many walk of whom I have often told you before, and now tell you weeping, that they are the enemies of the Cross of Christ; whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things; seeking the things that are their own, not those that are Jesus Christ's."\* Others come to be honoured, to be esteemed, and in due time to be promoted to offices of trust. Consequently, their thoughts are ever running on advancement, on the first seats and the first places; they dream of mitres and dignities; they are in very truth lovers of vanity and searchers after a lie.

It is not unusual to find among men of this stamp persons who, while living in the world, were lowly, unpretending, and without hope of ever bettering their position; but, as soon as they enter Religion, their sole aim is to make it a stepping-stone by which to mount to honours. Some men are attracted to Religion by the bonds of flesh and blood; and their chief study is to promote family interests. Finally, not a few are drawn to the Cloister by mere levity of mind and by childish impulse, neither knowing nor understanding what it is to lead a Religious Life. These, and all that resemble them, are far from having the first quality that our holy Father requires from the Novices of his Order. Theirs is a very material and substantial error. So long as it holds possession of their minds, this first quality neither has nor can it have any existence in their hearts. Oh, if you did but know the magnitude of the evil which, in process of time, you draw down both on yourself and on Religion by one or two unrighteous intentions, you would shudder with

\* *Philipp.* iii. 18; ii. 21.

genuine terror and would protest both by word and by deed, that you have come to Religion to seek only God. But although you may not, at present, thoroughly grasp and clearly understand this, yet, believe me, words are wholly inadequate to express the losses arising from evil intentions which are not completely ejected from the heart.

Therefore, search into its inmost folds, and if you discover anything that does not tend towards truly seeking God, lay hold of it and cast it forth. But how is this to be done? Give ear unto the best method that we can devise for you, and endeavour to make a proper use of it. In order completely to rectify this error or mistake, you must search for the root whence it springs, and on that you must fix your grasp. The error grows out of no other root than the false notion that those objects are good towards which you feel yourself attracted; for, as the Philosophers say: "No one is so great a fool, as intentionally to labour for that which is evil." It is good that all men desire, and towards which they direct their aim. This fact will be manifest to any one that will give the subject a little thought; for, he will see that the mainspring which sets in motion all human acts, is the desire of and the search after good. For, does it not seem to be a good thing that a man should obey his parents; that he should have an honest livelihood; that he should be esteemed and honoured by men; that he should help his relatives in their necessities? Yet, if all these various good things be weighed in the balance of the Sanctuary, if they be scrutinised by the light of faith, and by the light which the doctrine and the example of Christ and of His Saints shed on them, it will be evident that there is not any real solid good in them, but only a certain deceptive appearance of good. They are naught but phantasms of good, unless they are referred to God Who is the only good, and the last end for Whose service Religious Orders were instituted.

The better to understand this conclusion, be it observed that good is of two kinds—the one *real*, the other *apparent*. Real good is God only and that which is referred to God, as, for instance, virtue, or perfection, or grace. Apparent good

are all human consolations, meat, drink, amusement, wealth, honour, knowledge, bodily conveniences. There are seven characteristic marks by which we shall be able easily to distinguish the one kind of good from the other.

*Good that is not real.* (1) Whatever can be obtained in an unlawful way. (2) Whatever is common to that which is good and to that which is evil. (3) Whatever is common to the brute creation and to man. (4) Whatever either interiorly or exteriorly adorns and perfects the body only. (5) Whatever another man is able to take away from us against our will; also, whatever perishes at death is neither a real good nor a real evil, since real good and real evil follow the immortal soul. (6) Whatever either hinders or takes away a better good.\* (7) Whatever a man does that is not simply good.

With the aid of these marks, examine the intentions with which you chose the Religious State, and on account of which you desire, in due time, to make your solemn profession. Disguise nothing from yourself; for, it is a matter of the greatest importance that you should not. If you have taken this step for God's sake only and in order to obtain for yourself the possession of that which is really good, all is well. For having had the grace to make this choice, your thanks are due to God Who has called you from the darkness of a worldly life and has led you into the marvellous brightness of the Religious Life. Be strengthened in the Lord; be valiant; and suffer not yourself at any future time to turn aside from the way of righteousness, or, by an evil intention, to obscure the light which, through God's merciful bounty, has been made to shine in your heart. But if you perceive that, in your choice of this State, you have been

\* This is somewhat misleading; for, there are many things in themselves good and holy which either impede or prevent a greater good. Thus, a purely contemplative life is confessedly less perfect than one that is mixed—*i.e.*, partly contemplative and partly active. Yet those who embrace the purely contemplative life are hindered by their Rule, which is in itself good and holy, from devoting themselves to the works of the ministry. The sentence in the text seems to be taken from St. Anselm. But the Saint is speaking of perfection in its metaphysical sense, when he says that "nothing is a perfection unless it is better than that which is incompatible with perfection."



deluded by the deceitful show of apparent good, consider the folly of seeking bodily ease in the abode of mortification and self-denial; honour, in the school of humility; things pleasing to the senses of worldlings, in the cloistral abode of ascetical men. Even supposing for the moment that you could have in Religious Life all that the world esteems and loves—a state of things, however, which is utterly impossible—what advantage could you derive from it? What, indeed, but vanity, affliction of spirit, and the loss of those goods which are real and true: “What doth it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and suffers the loss of his soul?”

Therefore, despise your craving for merely apparent good, and direct all the intention, the affection, and the strength of your being towards the gaining of the one true good. Say to yourself with St. Anselm: “Why dost thou go about seeking the (apparent) good of soul and of body? By loving, seek for, and by seeking, love the one good, in which is all good, and it is enough. Desire the simple good, which is all good, and it is enough.” Engrave this resolve on your mind; frequently look on your resolve; let nothing ever erase from your memory its deeply incised characters. Then you may be sure that, so long as it lasts, you will never abandon God, and you will be enriched with many graces and with many favours.

Those persons fall into the other error, who, in their search after God, either do not wish altogether to turn away from evil, or do not seek Him with simplicity of heart, with strength, fortitude, and constancy of mind. By men of this stamp, God cannot be found. Hence it is not to be wondered at that there are so few who truly seek God, since there are so few who, while pretending to seek Him, pursue their search in the proper way and with the requisite dispositions.

In order to avoid this error, weigh well and endeavour to put in practice the following precepts, which we will explain in separate sections, that they may more easily imprint themselves on the memory, and that they may be more firmly grasped by the intelligence.

## SECTION II.

*In order truly to Seek God, Evil must especially be Avoided.*

The Royal Psalmist says: "Decline from evil and do good, and dwell for ever and ever."\* By these words he would have us understand that he who desires to win for himself real good and eternal happiness, ought above all things to turn away from evil. But let it be observed that there are two kinds of evil, the one *real*, the other only *apparent*. Real evil is sin. It is whatever withdraws us from real good. Apparent evil are trials, sicknesses, and whatever else is contrary to that good which is only apparent. The false and deceitful world proposes to its followers real evils, as objects to be sought after with all zeal; and apparent evils, as objects to be shunned with equal earnestness. But this wisdom of the world is foolishness with God, Who, being the very Truth, in all things loves and seeks truth. Therefore, whoever desires to seek and to find God the only true good, must detest with all his might and flee from that which is really evil.

We have already pointed out that, next to a lively faith, a real practical knowledge of the foulness and the gravity of sin, and, as a natural consequence, a hatred and a horror of it, are the foundations not only of the Religious but of the secular state. Motives for avoiding sin may be found in the treatise which we have written for the Postulant; these motives with a few slight changes will, with far greater reason, be of use to those who are already Novices, and serious attention should be given to the consideration of them. Moreover, Novices must not think that they do all that is required of them when they avoid mortal sins; they should most earnestly strive to avoid venial sins also, and especially venial sins which are committed with full deliberation. For, besides disposing the soul to fall into mortal sin, according to the text: "He that contemneth small things shall fall by little and little," these venial sins also give rise

\* Ps. xxxvi. 27.

to an estrangement between the soul and God, although they do not actually separate it from Him; and, as we know so well, a divided heart is hateful to God. Hence the Prophet Osee said: "Their heart is divided, now they shall perish."\* God asks for our whole heart, our whole soul, and our whole strength; and with justice: for, as He is the Creator, giver, preserver of all that is in our heart, and in our whole being, it is but right and just that all should be devoted to His service. Therefore, imitate David, of whom God Himself said: "He kept My commandments and followed Me with his whole heart, doing that which is well pleasing in My sight."† Hence David could say of himself: "My heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God:‡ for, what have I in heaven, and besides Thee what do I desire on earth: my flesh and my heart have fainted away: Thou art the God of my heart, and the God that is my portion for ever. It is good for me to adhere to my God, and to put my hope in the Lord God."§

Imitate King Josias, of whom it is written: "There was no king before him like unto him, that returned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his strength."|| Imitate so many other faithful servants of God, but especially the thousands of Saints who, in our own Order, have served God with their whole heart and with their whole soul, and those also who at the present time do actually serve Him, by avoiding even the shadow of the slightest venial sin. What else does the Lord God ask of you, than to fear the Lord your God; to walk in His ways, by declining from evil of every kind; to love and to serve Him with your whole heart and with your whole soul, that it may be well with you? Oh, how happy is the man who, by thus withdrawing himself from all that is really evil, devotes his whole heart and his whole affection to seek God, the only true good! In his person will be fulfilled the promise which is recorded in the Book of Deuteronomy: "When thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find

\* *Osee* x. 2.

§ *Ps.* lxxii. 25, 26, 28.

† *3 Kings* xiv. 8.

|| *4 Kings* xxiii. 25.

‡ *Ps.* lxxxiii. 2.



Him; yet so, if thou seek Him with all thy heart.”\* Also that which is found in the Prophet Jeremias: “You shall seek Me, and shall find Me; when you shall seek Me with all your heart.”†

Before we proceed to explain the other methods of truly seeking God, it will be advantageous for you to bear in mind that what has been said thus far, about avoiding the evil of any fault whatever, must be understood also of avoiding and of removing the causes and the occasions of sin; otherwise there will not be any safeguard against a relapse, or any hope of solid progress, no matter how firm may be your purpose of never again offending God; for, “he that loveth the danger shall perish in it.” These causes and these occasions of sin may be divided into internal and into external causes. Internal causes are vices and habits of evil, formerly contracted by oft-repeated acts, unruly passions, freedom of life, the absence of custody over the senses, and the like. External causes are attractive objects, a somewhat loose method of living, too great familiarity with others, human respect, and over-tender manifestations of affection. Therefore, examine whether you are under the sway of one or of many bad habits contracted in the world; observe by what passions you are most frequently disturbed; whether it is by love or by hatred, by anger or by sadness. Consider whether you keep your senses within due bounds; what objects are most dangerous to you; what is your manner of life; whether it is in that which you do, or in that which you leave undone that you are led by human respect.

Weigh well in the presence of God all these questions and others of a similar nature; make a firm resolve without delay to rid yourself of all your bonds and trammelling impediments; use those remedies which are best calculated to heal your disorders and at once set about this all-important task. You must, however, clearly understand that, in this matter, it is most especially necessary that you should have recourse to your Master for counsel and instruction. To him you must explain your difficulties; and when you have

\* Cap. iv. 29.

† Cap. xxix. 13.

done so, be careful to carry into effect the advice which he gives. For, by acting thus, you will experience less difficulty, because you will be assisted by another, and you will escape the dangers in which those persons are sure to be involved, who, trusting to their own resources, wish to be their own guides and masters in the execution of matters which are encircled with so great difficulties.

We will not here suggest remedies for each of the evils of which we have spoken ; for, these remedies depend for their success on many particular circumstances, and on this account require the particular instruction of your Master who, taking everything into consideration, must determine whatever shall seem to him most expedient. We may, however, in passing, mention one common remedy which it is most desirable that all should employ ; this is nothing else than, many times each day, to excite and to renew within yourself a love of real good, and a hatred of real evil ; to be so disposed towards things that are either good or evil in appearance only, as to accept and to embrace them, in as far as they will conduce to the attainment of real solid good. Those who follow this counsel will speedily perceive how great is the advantage to be reaped from this practice ; for, they will feel the benefit of it throughout the whole course of their lives.

### SECTION III.

*God must be sought with Simplicity of Heart.*

Cornelius à Lapide, commenting on that text of the Book of Wisdom,\* “Seek God in simplicity of heart,” remarks that the word “simplicity” has a variety of meanings. In the first place, it may be taken as opposed to duplicity, cunning, hypocrisy, deceit, and pretence ; for, any act that is performed with cunning and deceit cannot, as St. Ambrose observes, have the merit of simplicity. In the next place, it may be considered as opposed to curiosity. It is in this sense that the word must be understood when we are com-

\* Cap. i. 1.

manded to believe with simplicity that which divine faith teaches. Thirdly, "simplicity" may mean that which is unmixed, and in this sense may signify purity; for, that which is simple is pure, whereas that which is mixed is impure, because mixtures are made up of a variety of elements. Also, it may, in this sense, be taken for integrity or perfection. It has this meaning in that passage in which Job is said to be "a simple man," that is to say, upright, perfect. Fourthly, some writers understand it to mean generosity. Thus, when St. Paul says, "He that giveth with simplicity," he means, "liberally." In applying all and each of these significations to the proposition with which we began this section, we may say that the Novice ought to seek God, not with duplicity or with pretence; not with curiosity or with a divided heart; but with a heart that is pure, upright, perfect, and generous. In this present section we will consider in what way we are to understand each of these epithets.

The Apostle, in his second Epistle to Timothy says: "In the last days shall come on dangerous times; men shall be lovers of themselves . . . having an appearance, indeed, of godliness, but denying the power thereof."\* St. Peter says: "In the last days there shall come deceitful scoffers, walking after their own lusts."† For, who is so little conversant with that which is passing in the world in these deplorable and verily the last days of its existence, as not to know that it is full of lying, deceit, and hypocrisy? These evils stay not in the world; they invade the Cloisters of even Religious, in the persons of Novices whose sole aim seems to be to pass their year of probation under the cloak of pretended piety and to conceal their evil practices, in order that, after their profession, they may be able more freely to give a loose rein to their disorderly passions. If there should chance to be among those who read these pages any one of this number, let him ask himself whether this is truly to seek God? No, it is to tell a lie to God and to man by means of the habit which the Novice wears. With

\* Cap. iii. 2-4.

† 2 Peter iii. 3.



astonished ears, attend to the maledictions which the Holy Spirit launches against those who are of a double heart: "Dissemblers and crafty men prove the wrath of God."\* "The bloody and deceitful man the Lord will abhor."† "Thou hast loved malice more than goodness, and iniquity rather than to speak righteousness. Thou hast loved all the words of ruin, O deceitful tongue! Therefore, will God destroy thee for ever; He will pluck thee out, and remove thee from thy dwelling-place, and thy root out of the land of the living."‡ "Bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days."§ "The Holy Spirit of discipline will flee from the deceitful."|| "Approach not to the Lord with a double heart. Be not a hypocrite in the sight of men, and let not thy lips be a stumbling-block to thee. Watch over them, lest thou fall and bring dishonour upon thy soul, and God discover thy secrets and cast thee down in the midst of the Congregation, because thou camest to the Lord wickedly, and thy heart is full of guile and deceit."¶ "Woe to them that are of a double heart, and to the sinner that goeth on the earth two ways."\*\* "Cursed is the deceitful man!"†† Ought not every one to be filled with fear and trembling when he hears from the mouth of Eternal Wisdom itself, that oft-times repeated "Woe!" against those who are hypocrites?‡‡

On the other hand, consider with how many inestimable graces the virtue of simplicity is enriched: "The Lord will protect them that walk in simplicity";§§ "For, every mocker is an abomination to the Lord, and His communication is with the simple";||| "He that walketh sincerely, walketh confidently";¶¶ "The simplicity of the Just shall guide them";\*\*\* "A perverse heart is abominable to the Lord, and His will is in them that walk sincerely";††† "He that deceiveth the Just, in a wicked way, shall fall in his own destruction: and the upright shall possess his goods. . . .

\* Job xxxvi. 13.

§ Ps. liv. 24.

\*\* Cap. ii. 14.

§§ Ps. ii. 7.

\*\*\* Prov. xi. 3.

† Ps. v. 7.

|| Wisd. i. 5.

†† Malach. i. 14.

||| Prov. iii. 32.

††† Prov. xi. 20.

‡ Ps. li. 5, 6, 7.

¶ Ecclus. i. 36-40.

†† St. Matth. xxiii.

¶¶ Prov. x. 9.

He that walketh uprightly shall be saved.”\* To these texts the following remarkable words of St. Dorotheus may be added: “If any one with simplicity of heart seek God and the will of God, then, in the absence of other teachers, that loving Father will inspire the mind of even a child to guide him and to hinder him from falling; but if he deceitfully seek God, the Almighty Father will send him a deceitful teacher who will lead him into error and leave his feet entangled in the snare.”

From these words it is evident how hateful to God are those who walk “two ways”; who are cunning; who pretend to be that which they are not and hide that which they are. They may, at times, by their hypocrisy, succeed in deceiving man, but they cannot deceive God. In His own good time God will make them feel how rigorous an avenger He is of all double-dealing, by suffering their hypocrisy to be laid bare, either before the end of the Novitiate, or on the great judgment-day, when their hidden sins will be made manifest, unless, indeed, by hearty repentance they anticipate and hinder that dreadful confusion which must of necessity then fall on them. Therefore, let every one take particular notice of and engrave deeply on his mind, these words of the Holy Spirit: “If thou be wise, thou wilt be so to thyself; and if a scorner, thou alone shalt bear the evil.”† For, although scorners and deceivers oftentimes become exceedingly troublesome to a Religious Order after their admission to it, yet in the end they and only they bear the weight of the evil, when God Himself scorns their hypocrisy; for, “He shall scorn the scorners.”‡ With all this before your mind, see whether it is to your advantage to join those who pretend to seek God, but in reality mock and scorn Him.

But, besides these pretenders, there is another class of persons who are destined never to find God. These are the *curious*. According to St. Augustine, a curious man is one who eagerly searches into that which in no way concerns him. The evil which that act works in the soul of the

\* *Prov.* xxviii. 10, 18.

† *Prov.* ix. 12.

‡ *Prov.* iii. 34.

Novice is treated of by De Ponte,\* who “ considers it to be one of the roots of inconstancy, because when there enters an Order any one that is eaten up with curiosity, he usually occupies himself in judging either the Order’s affairs which, to him personally, have no reference whatever, or the commands of Superiors, and all the time neglects his own sanctification. Moreover, St. Theresa is very careful to warn beginners to put aside all thought about other things and about other men, and to occupy themselves solely with themselves, in order that their chief study may be to please God.† In exact accord with this advice is the advice of St. John of the Cross:‡ “ Never be scandalised and never wonder at anything that you may either see or hear; but keep your soul free from all these things by forgetting them. For, if you examine with curiosity into the lives of others, many things will seem to you to be evil, even though your lot be cast among Angels; because you do not see the substance of men’s actions.”

Therefore, put before yourself the fall of Lot’s wife, who being troubled at the destruction of Sodom, looked back to see how it fared with the wicked city. She was punished by being changed into a pillar of salt, that from this her wretched fate you may understand that God wills you, even though living among devils, to be among them in such a way as that you may not turn back your head to contemplate their deeds, but that you may leave them alone, as in no way concerning you, your only aim being to keep your soul pure before God, without suffering yourself to be hindered in any way from so doing, either by this or by that occurrence. For, you may be quite sure that in all Monasteries and in all Religious Communities, there will be some cause of trouble; for, the devil never desists from his endeavours to disturb the peace of the Saints; and this evil God in His infinite wisdom permits, in order to try them, and to give them opportunities of practising virtue.

Therefore, unless, as we have said, you look to yourself,

\* Tom. iii., Tract. v., cap. vii.

† *Vita S. Theresiæ*, cap. xiii.

‡ *Cautela* iii. *contra Mundum*.



you will be in the Monastery as if you were not in it; and how great soever may be the efforts which you make to be a true Religious, to attain to perfect self-spoliation and to introversion of spirit, you will not be able to compass your wishes, or to escape the spiritual harm which there lies in wait to destroy you. For, if you look after other men's business which in noway concerns you, even though you be induced to do this for some excellent purpose, and be led on by burning zeal, yet you will be ensnared by the devil in one way or in another; and, of a truth, you are effectually caught by him, as often as you permit to enter your soul anything that is an occasion of these distracting thoughts. Remember that saying of St. James: "If anyone thinketh himself to be religious, not bridling his tongue, but deceiving his own heart, this man's religion is vain."\* These words are to be understood of the internal tongue, as well as of the bodily member, which is "a world of iniquity."

Besides seeking God—after having first cast forth all curiosity—it is also necessary that you should seek Him with a pure, upright, and perfect heart; not, indeed, perfect with that perfection which we expect to find in those who have grown old in His service; but with that perfection which is looked for from beginners, according to that well-known saying of St. Bernard: "If you are beginning, begin perfectly; if you have already made some advance, this also make perfectly. But, if you have attained to some degree of perfection, forgetting the things that are behind, stretch yourself forth to the attainment of those things which are of greater perfection."† But because we have already‡ treated of the generosity of heart with which God must be sought, we will, after adding a few more words, bring the present section to a close.

Although, properly speaking, we cannot be large-hearted and generous with respect to God—since He needs nothing that we have, and, on titles innumerable, we and all that we possess belong to Him—yet, in a wide sense, those persons

\* *St. James*, i. 26.

† *St. Bernard, Ad fratres De Monte Dei.*  
‡ *Chap. i., sect. iii.*

may be said to be large-hearted and generous towards God, who, with great courage, enter the way of God ; who suffer not themselves to be cramped within the limits of vows and of precepts, but who with great alacrity hasten to carry into effect whatever they know will please God. God loves and seeks these souls ; for, as He Himself is most generous, He looks for a heart that is generous—that is to say, a heart that is broad, ample, prepared for everything, desiring and attempting to do great things ; He seeks such a heart as this in order that He may pour into that heart, as into a vessel capable of containing it, all the wealth of His grace and liberality. But, that you may the better understand how well fitted is a heart of this kind, for seeking God and for finding Him in the shortest possible space of time, listen to that which St. Theresa says on this subject : “ His Majesty loves generous souls, provided that they are humble as well as generous, and that they go forward without presumption and without any confidence in themselves. I have never seen any one of this character fail in the way, so as to be unable to proceed ; just as I have never seen any one that is timid and faint-hearted, even though he is humble, make so much progress in many years, as they do in a very few.

“ Of a truth, it is really wonderful what a great help it is, in this way of life, to spur ourselves onward to undertake great and sublime works ; for, although we may not, at the moment, have sufficient strength to complete them, yet the soul, by attempting to do them, does actually rise to a lofty height, although like a bird—the wings of which are not yet strong enough to bear it upward, the soul may fall to the earth through fatigue and stay there for some time. Moreover, I used often to have before my eyes and in my mind that saying of St. Paul : ‘ I can do all things in God ’ ; for, I clearly understood that of myself I could do nothing whatever. This was of great assistance to me, as well as that saying of St. Augustine : ‘ O Lord ! command what Thou pleasest, and give what Thou commandest.’ For, I used often to think that St. Peter lost nothing by casting himself into the sea, even though he afterwards began to fear.”

A little farther on, she points out one of the devil's snares, by means of which, under the false pretext of humility, he endeavours to depress souls that they may not attempt any generous actions ; then she shows how the knowledge which she has imparted may be made practically useful, especially with respect to the imitation of the Saints : " Humility, then, must ever be kept before our eyes ; for, by it we learn that of ourselves we have neither this virtue nor this strength. But, it is especially necessary that we should know of what nature this humility ought to be. For, it is my firm belief that the devil does everything in his power to harass those who give themselves to prayer and to the divine service, in order by the worry and the unrest which his attacks engender, to hinder them from making any notable progress in perfection. One of the ways in which he arrests their onward march, is by causing them to have a wrong notion of humility, and to fancy that they are proud if they have any desire to perform sublime and generous actions, to imitate the Saints and to desire martyrdom. For, he insinuates that the actions of the Saints are to be admired, rather than to be imitated. But, we may see at a glance, that while some of these actions are, indeed, only to be admired, there are many others which ought also to be imitated. A sickly, delicate man, for instance, would not act wisely if he straightway desired to fast and to practise the most rigorous austerities, and for this purpose were to retire to a desert, in which he could neither sleep nor find anything to eat. But, yet, even the weakest ought to think that they are able, by the grace of God, to do so great violence to themselves as to condemn the world, to hold honour in little esteem, and by degrees to divest themselves of a love of wealth.

" We are, however, so faint-hearted and so abject of soul, as readily to believe that the earth will fail us as soon as we begin to relax somewhat in that excessive care which we take of our bodies and wish to give ourselves up to the cultivation of our spiritual man ; whereas just the reverse usually happens ; for, no sooner do we devote ourselves to the acquisition, let us say, of attention and recollection of



soul, than all that is needed for our temporal wants is most abundantly supplied to us. We may imitate the Saints in loving solitude, silence, and many other virtues which will not tell very much on these our wretched and miserable bodies which induce the soul to give them that which is not their due, and to desire to be led onward with so great moderation and at so well-regulated a pace. Also, the devil himself, if he sees us at the very outset shaken with fear, strives with all his might to make our virtues of no use to us. He desires nothing with more ardour than to increase this fear and to persuade us that every practice of mortification will be injurious to us, and detrimental to our health."

St. Theresa concludes thus : "Therefore it is a matter of great importance, that he who is beginning to apply himself to prayer" (and the remark holds good in the case of him who is beginning the Religious Life) "should not be too much depressed and downcast" (which sentence means that he should be of a large and generous heart with regard to God), "and I pray you to put implicit trust in me, with respect to this matter ; for, in it I have had a long and wide experience."

Therefore, with great courage begin your Religious Life. Away with all faint-heartedness and dejection of soul. Exert yourself to seek God with a great and noble heart. Do not think that you will effect this by your own strength ; but, trusting in God, say with the Apostle : "I can do all things in Him Who strengtheneth me."

#### SECTION IV.

##### *God must be Sought with Joy.*

The Royal Psalmist says : "Let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord,"\* because God must be sought with a cheerful and joyous heart. To seek Him in this way is only reasonable ; for, he who seeks God is seeking the supreme good ; and he will most certainly find God, if he seek Him

\* Ps. civ. 3.

with his whole heart. God gives joy and strength on the way and everything that is necessary for us to obtain the end which we have in view. Therefore, David says: "Thou hast not forsaken them that seek Thee, O Lord!"\* Again; "Let them not be confounded who seek Thee, O God of Israel."† Also, our holy Father, in the Prologue to the Rule, says: "But in process of time and by long continuance in this holy course and method of life, the way of God's commandments is run with unspeakable sweetness of love." Because he who finds God is enriched and vivified by God; for, "He is the life and an infinite treasure."

Hence, the Psalmist says: "Seek God, and your soul shall live."‡ Let the heart of those who seek the Lord rejoice, because all that seek Him are in the company of the Saints who are rejoicing and seeking Him. It is related that the face of St. Alramius was always joyous. St. Clare was full of joy even in the midst of her sicknesses. St. Prosper was joyous at death. St. Romuald, in the midst of the greatest austerities, when attacked by the temptations of the devil and by the envy of wicked men, exercised himself with all the more humility and assiduity in prayer, in fasting, and in the meditation of heavenly things; nevertheless, his face was always so joyous that it inspired joy into the hearts of those who looked on him. St. William, Duke of Aquitaine, used to sleep on the bare earth, with a block of wood for his pillow. He wore a hair shirt under his armour and practised great abstinence, and yet neither grief nor adverse fortune ever changed the uniform serenity of his countenance. Palladius, speaking of the holy Anchorites and the companions of St. Apollo, the Abbot, says: "You might have seen them exulting in their solitude, and with a joy so great that the like of it is not seen elsewhere. No one among them was either melancholy or sad, but if any one of them wore an expression of sorrow on his face, the Abbot Apollo immediately asked him the cause, and then each of them told him the secrets of his heart. 'Be not sad about your salvation,' he used to say, 'for, we shall be heirs of the kingdom of

\* Ps. ix. 11.

† Ps. lxxviii. 7.

‡ Ps. lxxviii. 33.

heaven. The Gentiles will be sad; the Jews will weep; sinners will lament; but the Just will rejoice. Let those who are taken up with earthly things rejoice in them; but we, who are deemed worthy of so great a hope, how can we do otherwise than always rejoice, especially as the Apostle exhorts us always to rejoice and to pray without ceasing.'"\*

Such are the examples which the Saints have left for our imitation. Now, although no one will expect you to practise the rigorous austerities to which they, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, subjected themselves, yet we may with reason require that, amid the contradictions and the adversities which are always to be found in the lives of those who truly seek God, you should maintain a perpetual serenity of mind and of countenance, "for, God loveth a cheerful giver." Hence St. Prosper says: "When you do good, cheerfully do it; for, if you do it with sadness of heart, you do it as a machine rather than as a rational being."† Listen to the words of the Holy Ghost speaking to you by the mouth of Ecclesiasticus: "Give not up thy soul to sadness, and afflict not thyself in thy own counsel. The joyfulness of the heart is the life of a man and a never-failing treasure of holiness; and the joy of a man is length of life. Have pity on thy own soul, pleasing God, and contain thyself. Gather up thy heart in His holiness, and drive away sadness far from thee; for, sadness hath killed many, and there is no profit in it."‡ On this passage interpreters have made many excellent remarks, out of which we consider it fitting to select those which treat of the fruits and the effects of joy; also, of the remedies which are considered to be best for the cure of sadness.

The first fruit of joy is that it is, as it were, the very life of man, whereas sadness is the very death of his life: "For, a joyful mind maketh age flourishing; a sorrowful spirit drieth up the bones."§

The second is that joy is a never-failing treasure of sanctity; because, as Menochius remarks, joy cherishes sanctity, and sanctity joy; for, there is an absence of joy in

\* *Thess.* v. 16, 17.

† *Cap.* xxx. 22, 25.

‡ *St. Prosper*, sect. i. 12.

§ *Prov.* xvii. 22.



the breasts of those who are conscious of sin. Moreover, joy is a treasure of sanctity, because it makes us perform with eagerness all works of piety, such as prayer, fasting, and the like. Sadness, on the other hand, makes us fear and flee from them and exposes us to fall into countless temptations. For this reason St. Anthony recommended his Religious, who led lives of great austerity, to cultivate a joyous spirit, as being at one and the same time both a shield and a remedy against temptation. "There is one method," he says, "of warding off all harm ; it is to have the spiritual joy of a soul that is always thinking of God. This joy scatters the deceits of the devil as the wind scatters smoke ; it pursues after its adversaries rather than fears them."

The third fruit is that a man's joyousness of heart makes him long-lived, whereas sadness shortens his days. Cornelius à Lapide, commenting on this passage, gives the reason for both conclusions when he says : " Joy exhilarates, vivifies, and strengthens the vital forces which preserve the heart and the life of man and increase their strength. Sadness, however, has just the contrary effect." Speaking on the same subject, St. Gregory Nazianzen says : " Grief brings on men premature old age ; and time never restores fresh life to him whom sorrow has withered. An uneasy mind, like a moth, eats into the very bones, but a body which throws off all inordinate care is always flourishing." Hypocrates, Galen, and physicians generally, are of the same opinion. Hence, the School of Salerno gives these counsels for ensuring a hale and hearty condition of body : " If you have not any physicians, these will be your physicians : a joyful mind, moderate repose, and an abstemious diet."

We come now to speak of the remedies which are to be used against sadness. Not to overburthen you with precepts, we will give you only one. It is most excellent. Take it, and make of it the best possible use. It is nothing else than a good conscience, trusting in God and firmly fixed in Him. For, as St. Chrysostom says : " Nothing else is deserving of grief than the offence of God. This, and this only, can sadden the mind of a wise man. Therefore, St. Paul always

rejoiced, because his soul trusted in God.” \* Also, St. Bernard : “ Lead a good life ; for, a good life is always filled with joy, but a guilty conscience is always on the rack.” In another place he says : “ There is nothing more pleasant, nothing more secure, nothing more abounding with wealth, than a good conscience. It will be tranquil though the flesh oppress, though the world attract, though the devil terrify you. A good conscience is without fear when the body dies and when the soul is presented before the tribunal of God. It will be unmoved when both soul and body stand before the judgment-seat on the great accounting day.” † It is this good conscience that the Holy Spirit commands us to have, in the words : “ Pleasing God, have mercy upon thy soul ; keep thy heart in His holiness and drive sadness far from thee ” ; or, as Cornelius à Lapide interprets the passage : “ Do you wish to drive sadness far from you, and to have joy always in your heart ? Have mercy on your soul, by taking care that it is always pleasing to God ; and for this purpose withhold it from gratifying any of its evil concupiscences. You will accomplish this if you take your heart from them and bind it down to the service of holiness. If you can but effect this, you will cast out of it all sadness.” The words of the Wise Man have the same meaning : “ I have known that there was no better thing than to rejoice, and to do well in this life,” ‡ for, joy and well-doing are closely allied. They go hand-in-hand. Therefore, if you wish always to rejoice, then always do good.

From this conclusion you will easily understand of what joy and of what sorrow we have been speaking—to wit, of spiritual joy and of worldly sorrow. Worldly sorrow is not a gift of God, and it must, in every possible way, be shunned and kept at a distance ; spiritual joy must be cherished, and every possible endeavour be made to increase your store of it. Far from the heart of a Religious be all worldly, profane, light, dissolute joy. It puts to flight all that is good ; fills the soul with giddiness, with vanity ; and at last, though by

\* *Hom. ad Pop.* xxv.

† *De inter. domo*, cap. xlv.

‡ *Eccles.* iii. 12.

slow degrees, leads the soul to rejoice when it does evil and to exult in most wicked things. Of this joy Our Lord says in the Gospel: "Woe to you that now laugh; for you shall mourn and weep."\*

But, by no means ought we to shun or to put to flight that sorrow or sadness which is begotten of compunction, a sorrow which springs from the consideration of one's own and of other men's sins; of the bitter Passion of Christ; the compassion of our Lady; the dangers which beset the way of salvation; the pains of Purgatory; the prolongation of our stay in this vale of tears, and the like; for, the Scripture says: "Blessed are they that mourn; for, they shall be comforted."

Of this sorrow Cassian says: "It is very useful when it is begotten of compunction for sin, or of the desire of perfection, or of the contemplation of future beatitude. It is of this sorrow that St. Paul speaks when he says: "Sorrow that is according to God, worketh penance steadfast unto salvation; but the sorrow of the world worketh death."† But that sorrow which worketh penance steadfast unto salvation is obedient, affable, humble, meek, gentle, and patient, because it springs from the charity of God, and through an ardent desire of perfection, incessantly stretches itself forth to every bodily pain, to every mental sorrow; and being filled with joy and vivified with the hope of its own advancement, retains all the sweetness of affability and long-suffering, having in itself the fruits of the Holy Spirit, which fruits the same Apostle enumerates: "But the fruit of the Spirit are charity, joy, peace, patience, benignity, goodness, longanimity, mildness, faith, modesty, continency, chastity."‡

There follow now both the signs and the effects of the world's sorrow, which is not according to God. It is most bitter, impatient, hard, full of rancour, of fruitless grief, and of torturing despair. When it has cast its bands around a man, it paralyses his labour; it crushes his strength, and, being irrational, calls his mind away from salutary grief; it

\* *St. Luke* vi. 25.

† *2 Cor* vii. 10.

‡ *Galat* v. 22.



destroys the efficacy of his prayer and fastens a withering blight on those spiritual fruits which grow out of prayer. Therefore, with the exception of that sorrow which is conceived through a spirit of repentance, or a zeal for perfection, or a desire of future good, all other grief is to be rejected and thrust out of the heart, as if it was the spirit of fornication, or of avarice, or of wrath.\* As a remedy for vain, misplaced joy and for all hurtful sorrow, pass in review that which has been said in the first section of this chapter about the love of real good and the hatred of real evil. If you love nothing but that which is really good and hate nothing but that which is really evil, you will rejoice only at real good and you will be sad only at real evil. Thus, both your joy and your sorrow will be in accordance with right reason and with the will of God.

#### SECTION V.

*At all times God must be Sought with a Brave and Undaunted Spirit.*

The Royal Psalmist in the following words concludes his exhortation on truly seeking God: "Seek ye the Lord, and be strengthened; seek His face evermore."† This verse contains two salutary precepts, the fulfilment of which is very necessary for those who desire truly to seek and to find God: First, to seek Him with fortitude; secondly, never to give over seeking Him. On both these precepts we will offer a few suggestions which will be of great advantage to you.

God is not found in the land of those who live in a soft and effeminate manner; for, "narrow is the way that leads to life." Moreover, so many are the contrivances, the frauds, and the snares of our enemies; so many the sometimes open assaults which they make on those who wish to begin a better life, and especially on those who wish to undertake the Religious Life, that it is said, and not without good reason, that more than ordinary fortitude and courage are

\* Cassian, *Instit.*, lib. ix., cap. x., xi.

† Ps. civ. 4.

necessary to preserve a man from growing cool in his zeal of truly seeking God and God only, or from altogether failing in his purpose of so doing. "Wonderful and truly to be dreaded are the onslaughts which the devil makes on us," says St. Theresa; "for he paints before our minds vivid pictures of the world's empty glories; he represents its fleeting pleasures as if they were to last for ever; he tells us of the high esteem in which these pleasures are held by the world's votaries; he suggests thoughts about our friends and our relatives; he points out how bodily health is ruined by corporal austerities and strews in our way a thousand other difficulties of a similar nature. How violent, O my Jesus! are the storms, how dreadful the whirlwinds and the tempests which are raised by the evil spirit! Oh, how great is the affliction of the poor, wretched soul which knows not whether to advance or to turn back." But yet give not way before these evils; bravely withstand them, trusting in the aid of God, and not in your own strength which you know is but a feeble reed. Follow St. Theresa's advice: "Be on the watch and suffer not yourself to be overcome. For, if the devil perceive that you are firmly resolved to lose your repose and all the goods that he can offer, yea, and even your very life rather than yield one foot, he will cease to molest you."

Therefore, do manfully, and be not one of those who, like the men that went with Gideon to the battle, lie prostrate on the river's bank and drink from the running stream. But bear in mind that you are going to fight against the devils of hell, and that you cannot case yourself in armour of better proof than in the armour of the Cross.\* To make your resolution all the stronger, remember that the world is full of deceit and lies; that the very pleasures which the devil holds out to you are intermingled with labours, anxieties, and contradictions without number; that all these pleasures have an end; for, the men who have enjoyed them even unto satiety, at last die—some of them suddenly; their memory perishes with them; there is no longer any recollec-

\* *Castle of the Soul*, Mans. ii., cap. i.

tion of them. They lie mouldering in the dust, and the feet of the passers-by trample on them. Moreover, attentively consider and ask yourself, in the light which faith pours around you, whether you can procure for yourself a better and more sincere friend and lover than God, the Fountain of all good, even though you were to live till the latest moment that is measured out as the limit of human life? Call to your aid the example of the Saints and of holy men and say to yourself as St. Augustine used to say: "Can not you do what these men and these women were able to do, though they were as frail as you yourself are?"

To this, one other most effectual means may be added and employed in order to calm these spiritual tempests. It is one that has been given to us by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of Isaias. It is to be found in the words: "In silence and in hope shall your strength be."\* On these supports your fortitude must rest. Therefore, in silence—that is to say, without murmur, without complaint, with undisturbed mind—tranquilly and patiently submit yourself to every tribulation as being sent by God, and await your salvation and your deliverance at the hand of the Lord; for, as the Prophet Jeremias says, in the Lamentations: "It is good to wait with silence for the salvation of God";† and Moses, to the trembling Israelites: "The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace."‡ Isaias speaks of the strength which is infused into the hearts of men by a firm hope and confidence in God: "They that hope in the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall take wings as eagles, they shall run and shall not be weary, they shall walk and shall not faint";§ and Jeremias, in the chapter already cited, says: "The Lord is good to them that hope in Him, to the soul that seeketh Him."|| With these the Royal Psalmist joins his voice: "Because he hoped in Me, I will deliver him; I will protect him because he hath known My name. I am with him in tribulation; I will deliver him, and I will glorify him."¶ Further proof from the Sacred Scripture is needless. There-

\* Cap. xxx. 15.  
§ *Isa.* xl. 31.

† Cap. iii. 26.  
|| *Serm.* iii. 25.

‡ *Exod.* xiv. 14.  
¶ *Ps.* xc. 14.



fore, with these arms manfully defend yourself against your enemies, repeating with humble confidence these words of the Royal Psalmist : “ I will love Thee, O Lord ! my strength ; the Lord is my firmament, my refuge, and my deliverance. My God is my helper ; in Him will I put my trust.\* The Lord is my light and my salvation ; whom shall I fear ? The Lord is the protector of my life ; of whom shall I be afraid ? If armies in camp shall stand together against me, my heart shall not fear. If a battle should rise up against me, in this will I be confident.”† “ In Thee, O Lord, I have hoped ; let me never be put to confusion.”‡

The second precept is, never to give over seeking God ; that is, He must be sought from the first moment in which you enter the Monastery, till the last breath of your life. Therefore, never let the idea take possession of your mind that it is enough, with a certain amount of fervour, to go through the year of Novitiate. Do not buoy yourself up with the hope of one day enjoying greater liberty. Do not imagine that when you have made your profession, or when you have been ordained priest, or have been raised to this position of trust, or to that important office, you will then have more freedom for self-indulgence. God forbid that either these, or similar notions, should ever find a resting-place in your brain, or that they should even casually present themselves to your mind ; for, unless these and other ideas of a similar nature, are utterly thrust out and kept at a distance and the very opposite ideas introduced and cherished in your heart, you are not seeking God ; you have abandoned Him ; you are not advancing towards Him ; you have departed from Him.

The principles with which the mind must, in the very beginning, be imbued, in order to counteract the influence of these hurtful ideas, are the following : “ The Religious State is a perpetual violence to nature ; the present life is not a time for ease, but for labour ; in the Novitiate the foundation of the Spiritual Life is laid, and on that foundation all your future life is built, and daily must that edifice be cleansed

\* Ps. xvii. 2.

† Ps. xxvi. 1. 3.

‡ *Ibid.*, lxx. 1.

and adorned. By Religious Profession, by the priesthood, by dignities and offices, new titles for greater responsibility are received, but not for greater freedom of life; for those who are professed, the Religious Life is not a free life; it is one in which they are bound, under penalty of sin, to tend to perfection; so that, if before their death they desist from their attempt to tend to perfection, they expose themselves to the sentence of eternal damnation." Give an attentive ear to that which is said on this point, by a famous ascetical writer: "Let the Novice and the Religious imprint this resolve indelibly both on mind and on heart. In this Order I wish to seek and to serve God; I firmly purpose, no matter what may happen to me, to live and to die in this service and in this search; I will never withdraw the hand which I have put to the plough, nor will I, as Lot's wife did, look back." This resolution must be understood not only of not returning to the world and of not growing remiss, but, after profession, of striving to advance with even greater fervour. "Who is the true and faithful Monk?" asks St. John Climacus; and he replies: "He who from his entrance into Religion has kept the fire of his spiritual life unextinguished; he who till his last breath has been constant in adding fire to fire, heat to heat, zeal to zeal, desire to desire."

Therefore, do you also be faithful unto death, that you may receive the crown of life, a crown which is given only to those who persevere to the end, and to the last contend against their foes. Never, at any time, abandon your first charity, but strive daily to increase it, lest you should be reproached in the words with which the Apostle rebuked the Galatians: "O senseless Galatians, who hath bewitched you? Are you so foolish that, whereas you began in the spirit, you would now be made perfect by the flesh?"\* Never suffer yourself to be shaken in your resolve, by any motives, or by any examples, or by any words of any persons whomsoever. You will not, on the great accounting day, be judged by these things. You will not then be asked either

\* *Gal. iii. 1, 3.*

how other men have lived, or what they have said, but in what way you and others have lived according to the Rule and the State of which you have made profession.

## SECTION VI.

*Of Truly Seeking God, made more manifest by the Doings and the Sayings of Christ.*

In order that you may understand how all that has thus far been said on truly seeking God, is in admirable accord with the teaching and the example of Christ, as both these are described for us in the Gospel narrative, we will take from St. Luke,\* for our consideration, one passage in which mention is made of three men who wished to follow Our Lord. The first of these was rejected; the other two were admitted, on certain conditions, to follow Him.

“And it came to pass as they walked in the way that a certain man said to Him: I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest.” St. Matthew† tells us that this man was a Scribe. This Scribe, as the Fathers think, came to Our Lord with an evil intention—first, to obtain vain glory; for, he thought that he would be empowered by Our Lord to work miracles, from which he would win for himself the honour, the applause, and the glory of men. Secondly, to satisfy his avarice; for, “seeing,” says St. Jerome, “the greatness of the signs which were wrought by Jesus, he hoped that wealth would flow in on him from the working of similar deeds.” Thirdly, to seek his own advantage, while in the meantime he cunningly pretended to seek the Lord. St. Augustine says that this Scribe wished, through mere curiosity, to follow Christ. This fact is intimated in Our Lord’s reply, by the words “the birds have nests.” Yet, while simulating a wish to be Christ’s disciple, he craftily concealed his real intention. This fraud is signified by the words “the foxes have their lairs.”

\* St. Luke ix. 57.

† Cap. viii.



Finally, the Fathers take notice, that this Scribe was proudly presumptuous, and therefore, that he boldly said to Christ: "I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest." Jesus said to him: "The foxes have their lairs, and the birds of heaven their nests, but the Son of man hath not whereon to lay His head." Commentators say that the Scribe was repulsed by these words. It was as if Christ had said: "The Son of man hath not whereon to lay His head in thy faith; for, the foxes have their lairs in thy heart, because thou art cunning; the birds of the air have their nests in thy heart, because thou art light and giddy. Thou shalt not follow Me in thy craftiness and in thy levity; for, how can craftiness follow simplicity?" From these words it is easy to understand the cause of his rejection. But to make the matter still clearer, hear what St. Augustine says: "Why is it that this Scribe who was so ready to follow Christ, nevertheless did not find favour in His sight? It was because Our Lord saw through him. If this man had followed Jesus, it would have been but to seek his own advantage, and not the things that are Christ's."\* In another place he says: "Jesus saw that the man was darkened by crafty simulation and puffed up with windy self-elation. There was not in him any place in which the teacher of humility could repose. In striving to become a disciple of Christ, it was not Christ's grace that he sought, but the glory that might redound to himself from being in Christ's company."†

St. Paschasius speaks thus, on the passage in question: "Christ rejected this Scribe who did not wish really to follow Him, but only to pretend to follow Him. Christ detested his presumption. For, if He did not, how could He repel this man who wished to follow Him, and yet retain with Him another man who desired to abandon Him?" Therefore, it is evident that this Scribe was rejected by Christ on account of his pride, his duplicity, and his unworthy motives. If you are conscious that there is in your heart any fault of this nature, mark well these words

\* *Sermo vii. de Verb. Dom.*

† *Contra Faustinum*, lib. xxii., cap. xlviii.

and fear the threat which is uttered by Ecclesiasticus: "Be not a hypocrite in the sight of men, and let not thy lips be a stumbling-block to thee. Watch over them, lest thou fall and bring dishonour upon thy soul, and God discover thy secrets and cast thee down in the midst of the Congregation. Because thou camest to the Lord wickedly, and thy heart is full of guile and deceit."\* For, although you may, perhaps, for a time deceive men, yet God to Whom are manifest all the thoughts and the secrets of men's hearts, will not suffer a plant of so hurtful a nature to occupy the ground of a Religious Community, or if for some good reason He should permit it, there is grave cause to fear that, on the last day, He will deliver you up to be burnt with unquenchable fire, unless, indeed, sincere repentance intervene between you and His wrath to save you from utter destruction.

But to another He said: "Follow Me." That other replied: "Lord, suffer me first to go and to bury my father."† This is that second disciple mentioned by St. Luke. According to St. Bonaventure, this man was of a character altogether different from that of the Scribe. He was humble, simple, loving, and faithful. St. Chrysostom, speaking of him, says: "Observe how great is the difference between these two men: the first says, with impudent boldness: 'I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest.' The second, although making an excellent petition, does not wish to go away without obtaining his request."‡ St. Hilary says that, in the words of the Scribe, the absence of faith is apparent; but not in the words of the disciple. St. Ambrose observes: "The disciple is forced to stay; the Scribe is sent away, to give you to understand that the devout are accepted, the indevout are excluded."§ Let us now consider the answer which Christ gave to this disciple: "And Jesus said to him: Let the dead bury their dead; but go thou and preach the kingdom of God." By these words, Christ did not reject the humble, simple, loving, and

\* Cap. i. 37-40.

† St. Chrys., *Hom.* xxvii.

‡ *St. Luke* ix. 59.

§ *In Lucam*, lib. vii., cap. ix.

faithful disciple. By a salutary instruction, He taught that disciple to follow in His footsteps, not with a divided but with a whole heart; also, not to hamper himself with unnecessary care and business, even under pretext of filial piety. By this excellent lesson He confirmed the doctrine which we have been endeavouring to teach, namely, that of seeking God with an upright and perfect heart.

“And another said: I will follow Thee, Lord; but let me first take my leave of them that are at my house.” These are the words of the third disciple who wished to follow Our Lord. The dispositions of this man’s soul seem to have been similar to those of the second disciple, concerning whom we have just spoken. His mistake was similar to that of the Scribe; for, he was chiefly solicitous about temporal matters, making little account of those that are eternal. To act thus, is in direct opposition to the express teaching of Jesus Christ Who said: “Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God.” Our most loving Saviour made answer: “No man putting his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” Explaining this passage, St. Gregory says: “By putting one’s hand to the plough, is signified the opening of one’s heart by the ploughshare of compunction, in order to make that heart bring forth worthy fruits of penance. But to look back is to return to the evil which one has abandoned.”\* Euthymius observes: “He who follows Christ must once for all despise everything else and tread in Christ’s footsteps; he must not even take his eyes off Christ, lest he be caught and held a prisoner by the attractive spectacle of those things which he has left behind.”† Hence that saying of St. Chrysostom: “All good works receive their reward, when they have been persevered in till the end. But if, in the performance of them, any interruption is suffered to take place, no small ruin is the consequence.” It is evident, therefore, with what earnestness Christ desires His followers to tread in His footsteps, with a brave, constant, and persevering mind; and also on how solid a

\* *Hom iii. in Ezech.*

† *Apud Sylver., xix.*



foundation of Gospel teaching rests the doctrine of truly and with the whole heart seeking God.

In conclusion, observe how hateful to God are pride, cunning, and pretence; for, it was because of these vices that He rejected the petition of the Scribe who wished to be admitted into the number of His disciples. But mark, on the other hand, how acceptable to Him is a soul that is humble, simple, and faithful, such as was the soul of each of the other two. For, although both committed a fault, by being too solicitous about worldly matters, yet Our most kind Lord did not exclude them from the college of His disciples. He most gently and most wisely laid bare their error, in which they, being men of goodwill, did not obstinately persevere, but which, in conformity with the instruction given them, they hastened to lay aside.

Therefore, if any Novice, after having attentively considered and well weighed all these matters, discovers that he has not entered the Monastic State with all the good intentions wherewith he ought to have entered it, let him not, on that account, be dejected, but laying aside, as speedily as may be, those that are faulty, let him hasten to conform, as far as possible, with the instructions which have been given in the present chapter. But if he prefers obstinately to go on in his pride, hypocrisy, and error, let him fear that the terrible threats which are written in the pages of Holy Scripture may become, in his case, fearful realities, and he himself be made an example of that eternal misery, which is the lot of those who do not seek God with a sincere and upright heart: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked."

## CHAPTER IV

### OF BEING SOLICITOUS FOR THE "WORK OF GOD"

#### SECTION I.

*What the Novice must do to show that he is solicitous for the Work of God.*

As we have already, from various points of view, examined the subject of truly seeking God and have proved that it is the centre round which the whole spiritual life may be said to turn, we are in the next place directed, by the order which our holy Father has prescribed, to instruct you about the solicitude which you ought to show for the "Work or Service of God." This is a subject, the consideration of which opens for us the door of a well-filled garner, whence many lessons for our edification may be drawn; for, as interpreters of the Rule inform us, by solicitude for the "Work of God" is meant care for all those things that pertain to God, such as both public and private prayer; worship of the Saints; recollection of soul or renovation of spirit; examination of conscience; spiritual reading; the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass; the use of the Sacraments and particularly of the Eucharist and of Penance; spiritual conferences; the acts of the various virtues and especially of the theological virtues. But, because our space is limited, and many of these subjects have already been treated of by other ascetical writers, we purpose, at present, to speak of only those matters that are suitable for Novices. We will, therefore, divide the present chapter into two parts. In the first, we will treat in general of what you must do, in order to be solicitous for the "Work of God"; in the

second, we will suggest certain counsels which you must follow out in the acts and the exercises which usually go by the name "Work of God."

First of all and before everything else, you must entertain a high idea and conceive a great love of all that pertains to God. This idea and this love, you must, by every means in your power, endeavour to cherish and to increase. For, as our Order and all other Orders that have imitated it, are, on the one hand, primarily concerned with the contemplative life; and as, on the other, it may easily happen, owing to our natural infirmity that, by familiarity with the duties inseparable from that life, we at last fall into a habit of performing them in a mechanical sort of way and then conceive a dislike for them, it is evidently a matter of the greatest moment to fill the mind with a profound esteem for them and with a firm conviction that, as the body cannot live without food, so also the spirit, without the support of these principles, cannot retain its vigorous life, but it must of necessity faint away and expire.

You must use all diligence to understand the Breviary, the Monastic Chant, and the ceremonies which are observed in the Order. Before the Divine Office, carefully search out everything that is to be read; see it all beforehand and read it through. Do not content yourself with a merely material knowledge of it and with only the external observance of the rites and the ceremonies which accompany it; but furthermore, strive to fathom their mystical signification and to infuse life into them by means of suitable affections.

If the office of giving the signal for proceeding to Choir, or for attending the other spiritual exercises, is intrusted to your care, be exact in the fulfilment of its duties, by being neither before nor behind the appointed time; thus you will comply with that statute which ordains that "all things be done at their appointed times."\* Do not cause any delay during the day Office, or during any conventual acts. For each of the Canonical Hours and for all other Religious exercises,

\* Reg., cap. xlvii.



have your own pious intentions, joined with fervent and suitable affections.

By means of lively faith, endeavour to remember the presence of God and of His holy Angels and strive with all your might to keep the consciousness of that presence ever before your mind ; for, from this, as from a fountain-head, there flow all the other internal as well as external requisites for profitably assisting at the Divine Office, such as a becoming posture of body, the avoiding of curiosity, custody of the eyes, repression of laughter, silence, and the rest ; together with the greatest outward reverence, humility, attention, and fervent devotion.

Exercises of devotion are of two kinds : first, those that are common to all and that are prescribed by Rule ; secondly, those that are private, that is to say, which are adopted by individuals, over and above those to which they are bound. With respect to exercises of the first kind, be careful to conform, in every particular, with the usual custom of the Monastery in which you live, as far as regards time, place, manner, and the rest ; and take it for granted that if, either during the Novitiate, or at any other time, you presume, without a lawful reason, freely approved of by Superiors, to absent yourself from these, or to be guilty of wilful negligence during the performance of them, it is an unmistakable sign of spiritual decay which, unless speedily checked, will end in spiritual death ; just as it is a manifest sign of bodily illness when our ordinary food begins to be nauseous to us, and an indication of the advent of some grave malady which may imperil our life, unless a speedy remedy is applied. Now, although this care must be extended to all duties that are performed in common, yet particular attention should be paid to Choir duties which claim so large a share of our attention, and in the performance of which we spend so considerable a part of our daily life. The devil, knowing well what great advantages fervent Religious derive from this exercise, endeavours by every means in his power to inspire them with a disgust for it and to make them hold it in but little esteem. This he strives to do, sometimes by

suggesting that other exercises are productive of greater good; sometimes by scoffing at it; now it is by his own personal agency; and again, it is by the agency of others who savour earthly rather than heavenly things. Therefore, the soul must be fully equipped, in order to meet and to turn aside these fiery darts of the most wicked one. Its armour should consist in a firm resolve, constantly to persevere in this holy and truly angelic exercise, throughout the period of this mortal life; unless, of course, the express and unsought-for mandate of Superiors shall determine otherwise; for, to this mandate we must yield a ready obedience, while at the same time we retain fresh and unimpaired, our esteem and our love of this excellent duty.

With respect to private devotions, the following rules must be observed. In the performance of them, all singularity must be avoided, that is to say, none of the common exercises prescribed by obedience must, on their account, be either shortened or omitted. They must not be considered to be of greater moment than are the ordinary public exercises, especially if these private devotions have reference to some object which is not so noble as is the object of the public exercises. To persist in regarding them as of greater worth would be a grievous mistake. It would be productive of incalculable mischief in the case of even those who are apparently far advanced in perfection. Hence, St. Bernard speaks with a certain degree of well-merited sarcasm, concerning Religious who are wedded to their own ideas in this respect: "They are more smugly satisfied with one fast observed by them, while the rest of the Community have dined, than with a fast of seven days made in common with their Brethren; and one little prayer privately offered up by them, is sweeter than the whole Psalter recited in Choir."\*

A too great clinging to these private devotions, must be carefully guarded against. The existence of some such obstinate adherence to them would be indicated by the conduct of that Brother, who, when called by obedience, or

\* *De Grad. Superbiæ.*

by any other manifestation of the divine will, to interrupt them in order to accomplish any duty, should be troubled, saddened, and wearied in the execution of the command, without, however, altogether refusing to comply with it; for, no matter how pleasing to self-will these private devotions may be, it is nevertheless certain that exercises of piety are pleasing to God, then and then only, when they are in conformity with His divine will. With respect to both the points just mentioned, there is, in the works of Blossius, an excellent passage, in which, describing the devout and obedient Religious, he says: "He always prefers ordinary duties done through obedience, to those works of supererogation, the performance of which is left to his own choice, and prefers them, even though they are contrary to his own taste, and though they seem to him to be barren and insipid. If a Religious who is thus minded happens to be engaged in spiritual reading, or in holy meditation, and he is suddenly called away by the command of his Superior to perform some worthless, or some useless action—such, for instance, as gathering up straws—he delays not for a single instant, but straightway, without gainsaying the command, without passing any judgment on it, he interrupts his studies in order to obey, and in this way wisely leaves God for the sake of God. For, that which in itself is worthless and of little moment, is made precious and of marvellous excellence by means of obedience." In another place, quoting Thaulerus, he says: "If any one, by the grace of God, had reached so high a degree of sanctity as always to see God visibly present before him, and if he was called away to some work of obedience, he ought humbly to say to Our Lord: 'My dearest Father! permit me, I beseech Thee, to perform this work for love of Thee.' Believe me, this humble denial of self-will for God's sake, is far more pleasing to Our divine Lord than to penetrate into the kingdom of heaven and to mingle with the company of the blessed Spirits." In these exercises of piety and in all the actions that you perform in public, let there be a total absence of affectation. According to the wish of our holy Father,



enter the Oratory with all simplicity and pray with earnestness and compunction of heart. What is said of the Oratory must be understood also of all other places and of all similar actions.

These private devotions must not be multiplied beyond measure; they must be kept within judicious bounds which ought to be determined by your Spiritual Father; for, anything that is done without his permission must be set down to presumption and to vain glory, and for it there will not be any reward, as our holy Father observes in the forty-ninth chapter of his Rule.

With these provisos and safeguards, strive by every means in your power to preserve and to increase a true and sincere spirit of devotion. "Devotion," according to St. Bernard, "infuses joy into the germs of all virtues; it pours the sunshine of cheerfulness into all great works; it fills with moisture even the arid barrenness of dry bones. For, this singular devotion towards God floods the heart with joy; it is, as it were, a sealed and private fountain, set apart in order to water the heart of the spouse with the delights of the bridegroom."\* "Fervour," says St. Bonaventure, "is devotion's fire, which ought always to burn on the altar of the heart. The devout Religious must feed this fire with the wood of divine praise, lest at any time, through sloth, or through other occupations, the flame should die out."†

According to this Seraphic Doctor, three things are necessary for the preservation of this spirit of devotion. The first is a constant remembrance of the presence of God: "I set the Lord always in my sight";‡ "My eyes are ever towards the Lord."§ For, as the Angels, although sent on various missions, yet always contemplate the Divinity, so also a virtuous man, to the best of his ability, ought to keep the memory of God's presence always in his heart. Hence, if at any time that presence fades away, let him reproach himself for suffering this to occur. St. Bernard says: "Regard as lost all that time in which you do not think of

\* *In Cantic., Sermo xxxv.*

† *Ps. xv. 8.*

‡ *De Sex alis, cap. viii.*

§ *Ps. xxiv. 15.*

God; for, although you cannot always have your thoughts actually directed to Him, yet, at least, when you think of it, direct the eyes of your heart towards Him. When such an opportunity presents itself, let this recollection of His presence be formed into meditation or into prayer. Act in this respect, as those industrious sculptors do, who carry about with them the materials from which to carve their works of art; for, as they do, you will then be able to take advantage of every opportunity that presents itself, not indeed of improving yourself in a worldly art, but of advancing the work of your eternal salvation."\*

The second is a constant desire to please God in everything that you either do or say; so that being always in His presence, you may carefully avoid what will displease Him, you may be sorry if you do anything that offends Him, and you may study how to satisfy, daily more and more, His wishes in your regard, according to these words of the Apostle: "We labour, whether absent or present, to please Him."†

The third is in all your actions to begin with prayer; to return thanks for all benefits; to offer praise to God; and in everything that you do, to put trust in the efficacy of prayer rather than in your own labour and industry: "As we know not what to do, we can only turn our eyes to Thee."‡ Our holy Father gives us similar advice in the Prologue of the Rule: "First of all, whatever good work thou dost begin, beg of Him with most earnest prayer to perfect."

From this advice you may learn what that is in which true solid devotion consists. To give you a clearer notion of it, and thus, in the very beginning, to hinder any mistake in the matter, we will here cite what Blossius says about true devotion: "True devotion consists in complete submission of one's will to the guidance of authority, in resignation, in self-denial, and in humility, rather than in sensible sweetness. To experience aridity and desolation of heart, is certainly far more useful for the advancement of your eternal well-being, than to be flooded with loving desires, and feasted on

\* *Medil.* vi.

† 2 *Cor.* v. 9.

‡ 2 *Paralip.* xix. 12.

the luxurious fare with which God is wont to regale beginners. Very pleasing to God is that man who, filled with the spirit of faith and divine love, can say with all humility, in the midst of his poverty and barrenness: 'O Lord! though I am unclean and unworthy of that consolation which many devout persons experience, yet will I not abandon Thee, but I will be content, in accordance with Thy good will and pleasure, to be in desolation.' Spiritual sweetness is not an indubitable sign of sanctity. In bestowing it, God manifests His goodness; for, He sometimes grants it even to those who lead most wicked lives. He who is favoured with it ought to look on it with suspicion, unless, at the same time, he is stirred up by it to fresh fervour of soul, to a hunger for the acquisition of virtue, and particularly for the acquisition of humility, obedience, and the love of God."\*

## SECTION II.

### *Particular Counsels for each of the Exercises comprised under the name "Work of God."*

In order not to burthen your mind with too many precepts, we will, with respect to the exercises in question, pass over those which may be found in other books, and mention only those that we deem most deserving of your notice.

As psalmody is in very truth an angelic office in which praise is given to God our Creator, in the name of the whole Church; and as it has ever been one of the chief occupations of our Order from its very foundation, it is but right and just that, besides having a high esteem and an ardent love of this holy exercise, you should bring to the performance of it that careful attention and that decorous behaviour which are required in the service of so great a Lord. While offering up praise in His honour, let these words never fade from your mind: "Praise ye the Lord because psalm is good; to our God be joyful and comely

\* *Concl. Animæ fidelis*, c. xiii.



praise."\* Therefore, let not your service of God be given with sadness or by necessity; not sleepily or carelessly, but with joy and gladness, as the Psalmist in another place exhorts us, saying: "Let us make a joyful noise to Him with Psalms";† and the reason is, because "God loveth a cheerful giver." But in order that joy may never degenerate into light behaviour, let your joy be decorous, that you may be able to say with the Royal Psalmist: "I have loved, O Lord! the beauty of Thy house";‡ "I will praise Thee in a strong people."§ To keep alive the requisite attention and devotion, carefully read and meditate on the nineteenth and twentieth chapters of the Rule, in which chapters are enumerated all the conditions of public and of private prayer. Pay particular attention to the words, "with all humility and purity of devotion;" and, "we are to be heard for our purity of heart," that your aim may be to live a pure life; and that, if any stain should ever dim its lustre, you may, before prayer, endeavour by sorrow of heart and by deep humility to remove the fault of which you have been guilty.

With respect to private vocal prayer, there are two mistakes which must carefully be avoided. The first is, to make little account of it, and easily to omit the practice of it, because you either have heard, or have somewhere read that this kind of prayer is inferior to the other kinds. The second is, to be so attached to vocal prayers that, provided you get through a certain number of them which you have determined on with yourself, you care little about other methods of prayer, and you trouble not yourself during the recitation of even vocal prayer, to listen to God speaking to your heart, or to follow the motions of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, bear in mind that you must hold vocal prayer in high esteem, especially in the beginning, and particularly if you are not accustomed to internal recollection; that it is most necessary for acquiring and for preserving the spirit of devotion; for, if it be neglected, the mind will be hurried off

\* Ps. cxlvi. 1.

† Ps. xxv. 8.

‡ Ps. xciv. 2.

§ Ps. xxxiv. 18.

to pursue irrelevant matters, and, like the lifeless trunk of a fallen tree, it will not produce any fruit. Hence our advice is, that those prayers which may be said either mentally or vocally—for instance, the morning and evening prayers—should always be begun with vocal prayer, until the mind being softened and made ready for pious affections, scope may then be given for the operation of the Holy Spirit, on condition, however, that when His influence has passed away, recourse again be had to vocal prayer. In this way both mistakes will be avoided. It must not, however, be thought that vocal prayer is so called because it is made with the voice only. To believe this, would be a worse error than is either of the former. Therefore, it must be held as a certainty, that the mere recitation of the words of prayer, without any attention of mind, is not at all worthy to be called prayer.

Solicitude, with respect to mental prayer, does not consist in a wish to force God in a kind of way to accommodate Himself to our preconceived notions and rules; that is to say, by so obstinately adhering to them that, in spite of His sufficiently clear manifestation to us of the manner in which He wishes to treat with us, we nevertheless do not wish to accept the method of which He desires us to make use, but we cling to our own various ways of prayer.

Solicitude about mental prayer consists chiefly in first using reasonable care to remove the obstacles which stand between the soul and God, such as wandering of mind, immortification of the senses, deliberate venial sins, and particularly venial sins which are committed with some adhesion of the affections.

Secondly, in a close attention, both during and after prayer, to the movements of the soul towards God and towards pious objects, which movements are usually experienced by those persons who are careful to seek God and to be solicitous for purity of conscience.

Thirdly, in conferring with the Spiritual Father about these matters, in order to learn the will of God and to understand His method of acting with us during prayer,

which method all earthly masters and all earthly disciples ought to be willing to follow, rather than to lead and to guide in some method devised by themselves.

Unless this matter be carefully attended to, a great part of that precious time, during which others are heaping up for themselves treasures in heaven, will be spent in vain, and the person who neglects it will never be one of those who taste and see how sweet is the Lord.

In order to make yourself more susceptible of catching the whispers of divine inspirations, particularly during the time of public and of private prayer, be careful, even out of these times, not to give a loose rein to your thoughts, permitting them to fasten themselves on any objects that it may please them to select—even though these objects may be of an indifferent nature—but, in the very beginning of your Novitiate, to use every effort gently to recall your mind to itself and to turn it to God, in order to converse with Him. Do this, especially at times when you are free from other occupations, as, for instance, when you are going from place to place. On these occasions you may give Him thanks for favours received, or ask pardon for faults committed, or offer up petitions for needful graces, or lay open before Him the various necessities pressing upon you. All this need not be done in any set form of words, but in those which your affection may at the moment suggest to you. The advantages to be gained from this kind of spiritual exercise are well known to those who are versed in the mysteries of the Spiritual Life. In order to have an experimental knowledge of them, do you also take up and make use of this most excellent exercise.

Worship of the most Holy Trinity and the Eucharist, devotion to Our Lord's life and Passion, to our holy Father St. Benedict, to the Guardian Angels, to the other Saints, and to the Blessed Virgin who, besides her many other titles, is the special Patroness of our Order, do not consist in certain prayers which are daily said at stated times, but in the acts of a lively faith with respect to these mysteries; in firm confidence in the Saints and in the Angels; in



charity, in resignation, and in imitation of the virtues which Jesus Christ, the Blessed Virgin and the other Saints have left for our edification. For, although these prayers, when said at the proper time and in a suitable manner, are not without their efficacy, yet, unless there be joined with them the practice of solid virtue, they will be without that fruit which ought to grow out of them. This may be illustrated by that vision which was vouchsafed to a certain youth who, though most exact in daily reciting the Rosary in honour of our Lady, yet scrupled not to lead an impure life. On one occasion, in a dream, the Blessed Virgin appeared to him and offered to his lips a most delicious draught, but from a cup so filthy, that he recoiled from it with horror. Wondering how it could be that our good Mother should treat him in this manner, he asked her the reason. She replied: "My son, the prayers which you offer in my honour are most pleasing to me; but the cup in which you offer them,—your impure life,—fills me with aversion and horror." Startled by these words, the young man straightway changed his method of life, and subdued his evil passions.

As frequent recollection of mind, or, as it is called, renovation of spirit, which is usually made at the greater festivals, or every month, or every week, is a very great help to advancement in solid virtue, you must not fail, under the guidance of your Spiritual Father, to take up this laudible exercise. Whenever you go through it, ask yourself the following questions:—

1. Do I truly love my vocation and esteem it as a most special benefit conferred on me by divine goodness?
2. Have I a supreme hatred and horror of every sin whatever, of even the slightest, particularly if committed with deliberation?
3. Have I an ardent desire of perfection and a love of the true good?
4. Do I so cling to any created thing whatever, that it would be a matter of some difficulty for me to give it up?
5. Is there in my life anything that would make me hesitate at once to die?

Having carefully examined yourself on these points, renew within yourself the esteem and the love which you have for your vocation; show your gratitude to God by an exact observance of all the duties belonging to your calling and make a firm resolve to do them exactly and well. Renew your horror and hatred of every sin without exception; enkindle afresh your love of true good and of perfection; and strive to the utmost of your power to remove the obstacles which stand in the way of both these. Give up all inordinate clinging to any created thing whatever, since there is nothing but God that can satisfy the heart and give to it the repose for which it seeks. Finally, so arrange those matters which affect you from without or from within that, if God should so will it, you would presently and with joy yield up to Him your life.

In order to purify your conscience, to root from your heart vice, and, in its stead, to plant virtue, which is the fruit to be gathered from your general and from your particular examinations,—you must not be satisfied with merely knowing your faults; your chief care must be to grieve for them and to detest them with heart-felt sorrow. Take care, however, not to be downcast on account of your many shortcomings; humble yourself more thoroughly; and put your trust in God Who never abandons those that confide in Him and persevere in their good purpose. At last He brings to a glorious end the labour which they have undertaken for Him.

As it is in prayer that we speak to God and make known to Him our manifold wants, so it is in spiritual reading that He speaks to our souls and makes known to us His good will and pleasure. Therefore, in order that this holy exercise may be productive of much good in you, be careful to bring to it a docile heart, and remember that, "Wisdom will not enter into a malevolent soul, or dwell in a body subject to sins."\* Give heedful note to the parable of the Sower, and see that the word of God falls not on stony ground, or among thorns, or by the wayside, but into a good and

\* *Wisd.* i. 4.

excellent heart, in which it will bring forth fruit in patience. Our advice to you is, so to meditate on that which you read in the pages of various authors, as to draw from it whatever is good and suitable to your present position and to your needs. You will do this, if you take the trouble to compare that which they say with that which is written in your Rule. By so doing, you will, like the busy bee, draw from these flowers, not dew only, but honey also; that is to say, the spirit of our Holy Order and of our Rule.

So great are the treasures which are locked up in the most admirable and most holy Sacrifice of the Mass and hidden in the Sacraments of the Church that, he who while assisting at the one and participating in the others, is tepid and negligent—as, alas! but too many Religious are, may, with justice, be said to care very little about doing the will of our holy Father and to be indifferent about his own salvation. Therefore, when present at this Sacrifice, in which Our merciful and compassionate Lord has made a memorial of His wonderful works, take all possible care to ward off distraction of mind; assist at it with ever-increasing devotion; and receive the most Holy Sacrament with burning fervour of love. This devotion consists chiefly in acts of lively faith, hope, and charity, of heartfelt contrition, deep humility, complete self-immolation, and remembrance of the Passion and the death of Our Lord Jesus Christ. It is particularly for this last-mentioned end that the most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist, and that the unbloody Sacrifice of the Mass were instituted, according to these words of Our divine Lord: “Do this for a commemoration of Me.”\*

As our holy Father, on account of the importance of silence, seldom gives leave to speak, even to disciples who are perfect, although their words may be of good and holy matters tending unto edification; moreover, as St. James says: “If any man think himself to be religious, not bridling his tongue, but deceiving his own heart, this man’s religion is vain”—you, who are still covered with the dust of the

\* *St. Luke* xxii. 19.



world, will easily understand how necessary for you is the practice of silence, if you desire to become a truly religious man. Therefore, be ever more ready to keep silence than to speak; for, as St. Benedict says: "It behoveth a Master to speak and to teach; and it becometh a disciple to hold his peace and to listen."\* You will never know how to speak to any purpose, unless you have first learnt humbly to hold your peace. But, whenever you are obliged to speak, be careful to eliminate from your words everything that may recall to yourself and to others the memory of what you may have seen, or heard, or done in the world; all idle words, all words that excite immoderate laughter, and all buffoonery; for, our holy Father says: "Let no one presume to relate unto others what he has either seen or heard outside the Monastery; because therefrom arise many evil consequences.† But, as for buffoonery, idle words, and words that move to laughter, we utterly condemn and forbid them in all places, nor do we allow a disciple to open his mouth to give them utterance."‡ Let your conversation be about God and about spiritual things; for instance, about the observance of the Rule, the examples of the Saints, and especially of those Saints who belong to your Order, of ecclesiastical and of monastic ceremonies, and the like. But, in speaking of even such matters as these, take care that vanity does not creep in, that there is not any boasting, any loud talk; for, it is by defects of this kind that all the fruit is vitiated that may be gathered from properly regulated spiritual conversations.

Our last, our most useful and most necessary advice to you concerns the exercise of the three theological virtues, faith, hope, and charity. These virtues have immediate reference to God, and come most suitably under the name "Work of God." These are the solid foundations on which rests the whole structure of the Spiritual Life. These are the food on which we live during this our pilgrimage, the food without which we faint away and die. These are the light-house which flings its brilliant beams across the troubled waters and

\* *Reg.*, cap. vi.† *Cap.* lxvii.‡ *Reg.*, cap. vi.

points out to us the haven of safety. If its light is either obscured or extinguished, we are tossed about on the storm-swept sea of life ; we are in momentary peril of shipwreck. Fertile is the theme which they suggest, but because it is enough merely to hint at those matters about which Novices ought to show their solicitude with respect to God, we will simply add a few words which, if carefully attended to, will doubtlessly help you to satisfy the wishes of your great Lawgiver.

1. With respect to faith, examine what progress you have made in the knowledge of its mysteries ; and particularly whether, in addition to those things which every Christian that has arrived at the use of reason must know either as means necessary for salvation, or as means necessary only in consequence of a positive precept, you have a wider and more distinct knowledge ; and how great that knowledge is in matters of faith. On all these points make, in the very beginning of the Novitiate, a candid avowal to your Spiritual Father. Deeply imprint on your mind the essential motive of faith,—necessary for every supernatural act of this virtue,—which motive is nothing else than the authority and the veracity of God Who vouchsafes the revelation, and Who, being the first and supreme truth, can neither deceive nor can He be deceived. Hence, so great is the certitude which we have about the truths of faith, that they are as certain and as infallibly true as is God Himself.

Oftentimes during the course of the day, elicit from this motive, acts of explicit faith with regard to the chief mysteries of our holy Religion, to wit : “that there is a God ; that He is the rewarder ; that there is a Trinity of Persons ; and that the Second Person took our human nature.” Produce these acts, especially when you recite the Creed ; when you make acts of sorrow ; and when you approach the Sacrament of Penance and the most Holy Eucharist. The same advice will hold good with respect to the acts of hope and of charity,—let them be joined with the acts of faith and be elicited from their own proper motives.

The immense advantage to be gained by the exercise of practical faith consists in this,—that it will accustom you to judge of all things, not in accordance with the report which the bodily senses give of them ; or in the way in which men of the world would have you judge ; or as their vain and carnal prudence would dictate ; but, according to the rules of faith, to the example left to you by Christ, and to the teaching which fell from His blessed lips. Then your eyes will be open to see how great is the vanity, how vast the void which there is in many things that are commonly considered to be great and sublime. When you look at, or hear of, or when you are brought in contact with anything, you will not dwell on the mere natural qualities which it exhibits to your senses, but you will rise, in thought, to something that is supernatural. Hence, whenever, during the night time, you gaze on the firmament and behold it all ablaze with the radiance of countless stars ; or again, when you see the earth in verdure clad and softly carpeted with gay flowers, illumined with the light of faith, you will straightway fall down in adoration before the Lord and Creator of all these things ; you will bend before His omnipotence ; you will admire His wisdom ; you will extol His goodness.

Also, whenever an occasion presents itself for the performance of any arduous work of virtue, such for instance as are certain acts of obedience, of patience, or of any other virtue the practice of which runs counter to the inclinations of human nature, call to mind what are the dictates of faith with respect to each of these ; and what is the teaching of Christ. Then, hold fast to that which faith teaches ; cleave to it with even greater tenacity than you would cleave to it if you had seen it with the eyes of your flesh ; and in consequence of the certainty with which you hold it, resolutely turn your will to undertake the work, or to bear the weight of the Cross, animating yourself thereunto by the examples of the Saints of whom St. Paul writes : " By faith they conquered kingdoms, wrought justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouth of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, recovered strength from



weakness, became valiant in battle, put to flight the armies of foreigners. Others were racked, not accepting deliverance, that they might find a better resurrection. Others had trial of mockeries and of stripes, moreover also of bands and of prisons. They were stoned, they were cut asunder, they were tempted, they were put to death by the sword, they wandered about in sheep-skins, in goat-skins, being in want, distressed, afflicted, of whom the world was not worthy; wandering in deserts, in mountains, and in dens, and in caves of the earth. And all these were approved by the testimony of faith.”\*

Behold unto what acts of heroic virtue these holy men were able to gird themselves, when illuminated by the light of a lively faith! What, then, is the reason why we, in matters immeasurably less difficult, show ourselves to be so cowardly and so sluggish? It is because we omit to exercise ourselves in the acts of this lively faith. “Therefore,” as the Apostle exhorts us, “laying aside every weight and the sin which surroundeth us, let us run by patience to the fight proposed to us; looking on Jesus the author and finisher of faith, Who having joy set before Him, endured the Cross, despising the shame.” Think diligently on Him Who bore with so great opposition from sinners, in order that considering His patience you may not be wearied, fainting in your minds: “For, you have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.”† Lastly, we advise you to entertain a great esteem for everything that, in any way whatever, has reference to faith, such for instance as the rites and the ceremonies of Holy Church, the sacramentals, indulgences, the opportunities for the gaining of which are very numerous in Religious Orders.

2. The second virtue for the acquisition of which you ought to show yourself specially zealous, is an unbounded hope in God. Your motive for the pursuit of this theological virtue, is God as the helper of man in the removal of those obstacles and difficulties that stand in his way and hinder him from winning the rewards for which he hopes. Thus, David says: “My God is my helper, in Him will I put my

\* Heb. xi. 33, 39.

† Heb. xii. 14.

trust."\* In order that this motive may develop its full force within you, consider attentively, and believe with unwavering faith that, only in God are to be found those conditions or qualities which are capable of inspiring you with the hope of certainly obtaining this help. These are, that He is both able and willing to come to your aid. As He is wisdom itself, He knows best what is most expedient for you. As He is omnipotent, nothing can hinder Him from giving you assistance. As He is infinitely good, merciful, and faithful in the accomplishment of His promises, you cannot, without offering Him a grave insult, doubt about His goodwill to give you seasonable aid in your necessities. On these truths of faith, rest the stability and the certitude of our hope. But this hope is not without some dread and fear, arising from the uncertain co-operation of our free-will which is intrinsically weak and infirm of purpose. The virtue of hope may be practised in the following manner.

Although in every state of life, and particularly in the *beginning* of every state of life, it is most safe and even necessary not to be high-minded, but to fear, to distrust ourselves and our own strength, to have an intimate knowledge of our own weakness, and to fear it; yet, great care must be taken not to become faint-hearted and downcast, in consequence of these and of similar considerations, but to hold it as a sure sign that there must be some fallacy in our reasoning, when it leads us to have a feeble hope and a wavering confidence in the infinite goodness of God. It is on this account that the illustrious Father Lancisius, in his advice to some students who were about to enter the Novitiate, says: "Reject as blasphemies all thoughts that tend to diminish your confidence in God, to make you cowardly, and to fill you with sorrow which narrows the generosity of your hearts. These thoughts are exceedingly hurtful, not only to Novices, but even to those who have grown old in the service of God. Therefore, entertain only those thoughts that will give you courage, make you joyous, and increase your hope in God."

\* Ps. xvii. 2.

Frequently sigh after, and with your whole heart desire to reach that happy land—that secure haven of rest—in which all beatitude lies stored up for you; and, in consequence of this longing, so regulate your affections with respect to temporal goods, that these affections will be fastened on temporal goods only in as far as they may assist you in winning the prizes that endure for ever.

Be careful not to confine your hope to good affections and to ardent desires only, but stir it up manfully to do and bravely to endure in the way of salvation, all that is irksome and difficult; for, such is the exhortation of the Holy Spirit: “Do ye manfully, and let your heart be strengthened, all ye that hope in the Lord.”\* For, what is said of faith may be said of hope also: “Without works it is dead.” Consequently, the Apostle, while exhorting the Romans to rejoice in hope, says: “In carefulness not slothful; in spirit fervent; serving the Lord. Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; instant in prayer.”† Attend to what our holy Lawgiver says: “In suffering things that are hard, contrary, and injurious, grow not weary, give not over, since the Scripture saith: ‘He only that persevereth to the end shall be saved.’” Again; “Let thy heart be comforted, and expect the Lord.” Showing that the faithful man ought to bear all things for Our Lord, be they ever so contrary, the Scripture saith, in the persons of the sufferers: “For thee we suffer death all the day long; we are esteemed as sheep for the slaughter.” Being assured by hope of a reward from God’s hands, they go on rejoicing and saying: “But in all things we overcome by the help of Him Who hath loved us.”‡

Frequently repeat to yourself and think of that saying of the Apostle: “I can do all things in Him Who strengtheneth me.”§ We glory in the hope of the sons of God; and not only so, but “we glory also in tribulations, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience trial, and trial hope, and hope confoundeth not.”|| Take notice, however, that the only reason for his trust in any of these works, is

\* Ps. xxx. 25.

§ *Philip.* iv. 13.

† Cap. xii. 11, 12.

|| *Rom.* v. 3-5.

‡ Cap. vii., 4 *Grad. humil.*



that God has willed us to merit heaven through their instrumentality, aided by His own gracious assistance; but, as Blossius remarks, we put our chief hope of salvation, not so much in the merits of the good works that we have performed, as in the merits and the compassionate mercy of Jesus Christ; and when our implacable foe tempts us to want of confidence in God, or to despair of salvation, we meet his suggestions by placing before ourselves the bitter Passion and death of Our dear Redeemer.

Finally, take particular notice of the consoling doctrine of this illustrious writer who says: "When you begin to lead a better life, it may, perchance, happen that through human frailty, you will occasionally commit some fault. You will, perhaps, go beyond due bounds through buoyancy of spirits, through impatience, the impulse of anger, lukewarmness, sensual and carnal affection; you will be intemperate in eating and in drinking; you will be invaded by an exuberance of animal spirits; you will be immoderately anxious and troubled; yet, by reason of these and of a multitude of similar defects, you ought not to lose heart, even though you cannot be rid of them for the whole period of your mortal life. On the contrary, after the commission of any fault, humbly lament over it and grieve that you have not been more watchful and more thoroughly averse from even the slightest stain of sin; then, having lovingly asked pardon from Our most merciful God, take fresh courage, and be confident that you have been received back to His favour. But even if it should happen—a misfortune which may God avert—that you should ever fall into grievous sin, rise from it every time that you have the misfortune of falling into it, and never despair of salvation. Return to your most kind and loving God, and He will gladly receive you. He has both the power and the will to pardon every one that is truly contrite; to draw him from the mire of sin; and to free him from every hindrance to salvation, no matter of what nature that hindrance may be.

"Hence, man cannot more foully dishonour or more gravely insult God, than by despairing of mercy, because of

the multitude and the heinous nature of his transgressions. God's mercy is infinitely greater than are the sins of the whole world. Therefore, never suffer the number, or the magnitude, or the gravity of your sins to break down your hope of pardon. For, God Who is supremely good, merciful, clement, and loving, wills neither the death nor the damnation of the sinner, but with the utmost vehemence desires that he should be converted and that he should attain to the beatitude of eternal life."\*

The third theological virtue is charity. The essential motive of charity is God as our supreme good and our last end, or divine goodness as it is in itself, without respect to our own interest or to our own convenience. This is the end or object of all precepts, vows and Rules. In it perfection consists; and to this perfection men, and especially religious men, are bound to tend. Without this charity no one can be perfect, even though he is endowed with faith, with knowledge, with graces gratuitously given, and with other virtues, as St. Paul expressly teaches in the thirteenth chapter of his first Epistle to the Corinthians. The acts of this virtue are two in number—namely, the love of God above all things, and the love of our neighbour for God's sake. The various ordinances of the Holy Rule are intended to make us continually put in practice these two acts, and daily to increase in our love of God and of our neighbour. Therefore, you must not spare yourself any labour, you must not shrink from any pain, in order daily to make progress in the acts of this, the most excellent of virtues; and by the removal of those hindrances which are begotten of self-love and of an inordinate attachment to creatures, to cause it to take deeper root in your soul.†

With respect to the other act, which is the love of our neighbour or fraternal charity, it would be well to keep before your mind's eye the love which the primitive Christians had for one another. Speaking of them, the

\* *Sacell. Animæ*, sect. i., n. 3.

† For the various steps by which men attain to the practice of Divine Love, see *Blosius, Sacell. Animæ*, sects. 3 and 4.

Sacred Text says: "The multitude of believers had but one heart and one soul." There were many bodies, but there were not many souls; there were many bodies, but there were not many hearts, as St. Bernard observes. Happy the Cloister of which the inmates strive to emulate this love of the early Christians! "It is this love that makes Religious, that makes Monks. The Monastery from which it has vanished is a very hell. Those who live in it are devils. But in what place soever love reigns supreme, there, in very truth, is paradise; its people are Angels."\* We may gather from that chapter of our holy Father's Rule, a chapter which treats of the "Instruments of Good Works," how earnest was his desire that his children should be remarkable for their charity; for, out of the seventy-two "instruments" which constitute an excellent compendium of the Rule, well-nigh half are to be employed for the acquisition of brotherly love. This is not all; for, in several other chapters there are admonitions and precepts, the aim of which is to preserve charity among the Brethren. We commend to your special notice that which is said in the seventy-second chapter. Carefully study it, and devote yourself to the continual practice of that which it inculcates. But take care not to mistake false love, or a love that is not virtuous, for true charity. There is a charity that is hypocritical, that makes a pretence of loving, but that is full of bitterness and of deceit.

Also, there is a charity that, although not false and fictitious, yet deserves not the name "virtuous charity." This is that charity which is restricted within merely natural limits; which rests on merely natural motives, such as relationship, similarity of tastes, beauty of form, natural talent, sweetness of disposition, and the like. This species of charity, unless restrained by right reason, usually runs into all kinds of follies, and sometimes into even grave evils.

Therefore, the charity which is here so highly commended, is that spiritual and supernatural charity by which we are united to one another and by which we love one another for

\* St. Jerome, *Reg. Monach.*



God's sake only, because we are made to the image of God, redeemed by the most precious blood of Christ, and made capable, through the mercy of God, of the same glory and love. With your whole heart embrace this charity; and, as the Apostle says to the Corinthians, "if you are in faith, prove yourselves," so do we say to you, "if you are in charity, prove yourself;" but prove yourself by doing works which are in conformity with this virtue; because love manifests itself by deeds. "My little children," says St. John, "let us not love in word, but in deed and in truth."\* Let there not go by a single day in which you do not elicit, through a supernatural motive, some acts of this virtue. If you constantly exercise yourself in these acts, you will be able to say with the Royal Psalmist: "Behold how good and how pleasant a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity."

Let that which has been said thus far, concerning each of the subjects treated of in the present chapter, suffice to point out to you the object towards the attainment of which your efforts must be directed, and also by what actions especially you ought to prove your eagerness for the "Work of God."

\* I *St. John* iii.

## CHAPTER V

### OF THE EAGERNESS OF THE NOVICE FOR OBEDIENCE

ALTHOUGH the bond of union existing between humility and obedience is so close that it is practically impossible to separate the one virtue from the other, yet, in order to adhere to the method which our holy Father has pursued in the Rule,\* we will devote a separate chapter to the consideration of each. In the present chapter we will treat of obedience, after prefacing that which we have to say on this virtue with a few observations which are common to obedience and to humility.

You must know that both these virtues are so necessary for you that, if you showed yourself to be careless and negligent about them, we should have no hesitation in gravely doubting of your perseverance; and if you did persevere, we should have reason to question whether you would ever make any progress in perfection. For, as no one either has lived or can live without air, so, also, no one can be a Benedictine, or, indeed, a Religious of any other Order, except in name only, unless he has obedience and humility which are the very breath of Religious Life. Read the Rule from cover to cover, and you will find that there is nothing more frequently insisted on than are obedience and humility. It would take too much time to adduce from its pages passages concerning these virtues; nevertheless, we will farther on bring forward some of its most striking sentences, when we come to treat of humility and of obedience. Give an attentive ear to that which Our Lord said to St. Bridget: "How is it possible for any one that

\* Cap. lviii.

professes to follow a Rule, to be ignorant of that Rule which he both reads and hears read? In that Rule the Monk is taught to be humble and obedient; to wear a poor habit, not one that is soft and fine; a habit which will edify, not one which by reason of its beautiful texture will be an occasion of scandal to others. Who is there that is so dull as not to know that he has made profession of humility and of poverty? Therefore, a Benedictine Monk is one who obeys the Rule rather than his own flesh; who neither in his dress nor in his manners desires to please any one except God only; who every day desires to die; who prepares himself to go forth from this world; who is solicitous as to what manner of account he shall be able to give of his observance of St. Benedict's Rule."\* From these words you will see with what good reason we have said that the spirit of our Order consists in obedience and in humility.

As we have already treated† of the motives which should incite you to humility and to obedience, of the acts by which these virtues should be exercised, and of the conditions by which these acts should be accompanied, we will now point out a secure way in which you may prove your solicitude for obedience, without either missing your aim or foolishly persuading yourself that you have made progress, whereas you have not stirred one foot, being deceived by the mere semblance of virtue.

In order to prove your eagerness for obedience, at your first entrance on your year of probation, attentively listen to that which our holy Lawgiver says to you: "Therefore are my words now addressed to thee, who, renouncing thy own will, dost take upon thee the strong and bright arms of obedience, to fight under the Lord Christ our true King."‡ By these words he indicates that he neither legislates for nor regards as his disciple, any one that will not give up his will and devote himself to obedience. Therefore, in the very beginning, either straightway renounce your will and gird yourself up for the work of obedience, or draw back the foot

\* *Revelat.*, lib. iv., cap. cxxvii.

† The Eight Days' Retreat, in the "Postulant."

‡ *Prol. in Reg.*



which you have set on the threshold of the Novitiate. For, as Trithemius, in his Commentary on this passage, says: "St. Benedict first of all requires the giving up of self-will, before he will accept any one as a scholar; for, he who is still the slave of self-will has no part in this Rule. A Monk who does not lay aside his own will is not that which he is called; consequently he provokes the wrath of God. For, the first weapon with which a Monk arms himself is the abdication of his will; and unless he gives up that will, he is not a Monk. Therefore, if you wish to be a Monk, give up self-will." The Abbot John, describing the purpose of the Cenobite, says: "The Cenobite's purpose in life is to mortify his senses and to crucify his will."\* "To obey the will of another," says Sulpitius Severus, "this is his first virtue."† Therefore, as our holy Father chose to legislate for Cenobites, in preference to all other kinds of Monks, because he considered Cenobites to be the most excellent, it follows that any one that refuses to mortify and to crucify his will and to yield obedience to the will of another, cannot pretend to be a child of St. Benedict.

Therefore, your first care must be, in everything to deny and cut off self-will. To aid you in doing this, take the following sentence from the Rule, lay it up in your mind, and, whenever an occasion offers, strive to put it in practice: "Let no one follow that which he thinketh profitable to himself, but rather that which is profitable to another."‡ O truly golden rule, productive of virtues innumerable! If all Religious did but observe it, each Monastery would be a Paradise; self-love would be cast forth; and loving peace would reign supreme. By the words "profitable to another," we must understand inferiors as well as Superiors; but yet in such a way that the subordination of one to another, which is prescribed in the seventy-first chapter, be duly observed. St. Bonaventure gives a similar order, but in other words: "In good and in indifferent matters, let your aim be to carry out the wishes of others rather than your

\* Cassian, *Collat.* xix., cap. viii.

† *Dialog.*, lib. i., cap. v.

‡ Cap. lxxii.

own; in outward actions, study how to deny yourself, by striving in those things that are lawful to do the will of others, particularly if these others should be your Superiors.”\* The aim of a Novice, from the very beginning of his spiritual life, ought to be to acquire the habit of never having a choice of or a preference for occupation, for place of abode, or for rank. He should leave all these things in the hands of God, to be disposed of as it shall seem good to that loving Father. He should not dislike anything except sin. This temper of mind is found in those who have made a good Novitiate; because they have not any special care, or aim, or desire, except that which it shall please Superiors to choose for them.

Behold how vast a field for victories over self is here stretched out before you! What opportunities for acquiring immense stores of merit are within your reach! From morning till night, from night till morning, there is scarcely a moment in which you may not win for yourself a glorious triumph over your fallen nature. Even sleep, and meat, and drink, taken in moderation, as well as all other actions of a similar kind, are not without merit, if performed, not because they are pleasing to you, but because right reason and the will of God, made known to you by Superiors, require you to perform them. But that you may learn how to combat your self-will and your natural inclinations, accept those things that are displeasing to you—such as are many occurrences which will befall you during the Novitiate and during your future life—as either sent or permitted by God. If you regard them as coming from the hands of a loving Father, you will correspond with the most holy designs of providence; all things will work together for you unto good; and you will avoid the mistakes usually made by those persons who think that solid obedience may be obtained in some other way, and form for themselves a false ideal of this virtue, that they may not be forced to bid adieu to their own inclinations and affections to which they cling with so great tenacity of purpose. Such as these are

\* *De Remed. Defect.*, cap. iv.

not considered by God to be obedient. They themselves may imagine that they possess this virtue ; and others, who judge only by outward appearances, may be led to think so too, but they have not the essential motive of this virtue. That motive is nothing else than to execute commands, in order thereby to submit ourselves to the divine will and ordinance, made known to us by God's representatives, and to go against the dictates of self-will, or, at least, not to follow them.

Hence it is evident that he is not truly obedient, who, although he does that which is commanded, yet does it because he has a nature that is pliable and easily guided ; or because that which is commanded is not repugnant to his natural inclination ; or because the person who issues the command and the manner in which he imposes it, are pleasing to him ; or because he hopes for a reward or for some advancement ; or because he fears to offend ; or for any other reason that is merely natural. To all that obey through motives such as these, the words of the Prophet Aggeus may be applied : " You have sowed much, and brought in little ; you have eaten, but you have not had enough ; you have drunk, but you have not been filled with drink ; you have clothed yourselves, but you have not been warmed ; and he that hath earned wages put them into a bag with holes."\* Hence it comes to pass that, when their year of probation is over, or when these motives cease to influence them, or when the Judge on the accounting day begins to question concerning their obedience, their hands are found empty ; because they put into a bag pierced with holes their laborious works which were, in all likelihood, more grievous to them than deeds of real and true obedience would have been ; and God grant that for having so done, their lot may not be cast with the disobedient ! For, it not unfrequently happens that, when the aforesaid human motives cease to influence them, they fear not openly to murmur and to cast off the yoke of obedience.

We have still much to say concerning this excellent

\* Cap. i. 6.



virtue; but, because it is treated of in countless other spiritual books, we will content ourselves with directing your special attention to the two qualities which must be found in it, whether you are performing actions common to the whole Community, or are carrying out some particular order of Superiors. These qualities are, that your obedience should be *prompt* and *cheerful*. If you read with careful attention, the fifth chapter of the Rule, to say nothing of the many other passages which treat of obedience, you will perceive how great is the esteem in which these two qualities were held by St. Benedict. According to his teaching, the truly obedient man, as soon as anything is commanded, it matters not whether that thing is notified to him by the striking of a clock or by the tolling of a bell, makes no more delay in executing the command than he would make if the call or the order had come direct from God. He straightway leaves that with which he is occupied; forsakes his own will; he does not finish that in which he is engaged; but, with the speedy foot of obedience, he follows by his deeds the voice of him who commands and in a moment carries into effect the order that has been issued. All this he does without sadness, without compulsion. He does it with a soul full of joy which manifests itself by the cheerfulness of his countenance, knowing that God loveth a cheerful giver. Yet you must not suppose that this joy is always of such a nature as to make its presence felt. A joy of this kind is not at all times within your reach and under your command. It is a spiritual joy arising from the thought that God Who is seen with the eyes of faith, is everywhere present, and that it is for His sake that you obey; for, to obey Him is the supreme, the only joy of the soul that is truly seeking God. The Prophet Baruch represents inanimate nature itself as being filled with this spirit: "The stars have given light in their watches and rejoiced; they were called and they said: 'Here we are'; and with cheerfulness they have shined forth to Him Who made them."

We cannot better bring this chapter to a close than by citing words which are well deserving of your attentive con-

sideration. "I have already oftentimes learnt by experience," says St. Theresa,\* "and I have read in many books, that it is an excellent thing for the soul not to transgress the precept of obedience. I count among the benefits springing from so doing, progress in virtue and the acquisition of humility. Obedience is a great source of security in the midst of that fear and trembling in which we ought to live during this mortal life. In this virtue is found that repose which is so greatly needed by souls that wish to please God; for, if they truly resign and entirely give themselves up to holy obedience, they will not follow any other opinions, or any other orders than those of their Confessor, or, if they are Religious, than those of their Superior. The devil ceases from his endeavour to fill them with unrest and disquietude; because he sees that in tempting them, he loses rather than gains any influence over them. The feverish and unruly movements of our minds which rejoice in accomplishing the dictates of self-will, and also whenever there is question of self-gratification, in overriding those of sound reason, cool down and submit themselves to the guidance of right order, when we remember that, with steadfast resolve, we have given up our wills into the hands of the divine will. In consequence of this surrender, we subject ourselves to him whom we have chosen to hold the place of God in our regard." To corroborate these words of St. Theresa, hear what the Fathers of the Desert say: "A Monk cannot possibly overcome anger, sadness, and the spirit of uncleanness, unless he has first learnt to mortify his self-will by means of obedience. Without this knowledge, he cannot acquire true humility of heart, or preserve charity with his Brethren, or persevere in the Monastic Life."†

\* *Book of Found. Prolog.*

† *SS. Ægypti Patrum Vitæ*, cap. xxi.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE NOVICE MUST BE EAGER FOR HUMILIATION

WE are now about to direct your attention to the consideration of another virtue, closely allied to that lowly obedience, of which so much has already been said in the preceding chapter. This virtue is none other than humility, which St. Benedict designedly puts before you under the name *opprobria*, or humiliation. We say that he has intentionally used the word *opprobria*; for, he who has schooled himself to endure humiliation, derision, injurious treatment and scorn, who is even eager to suffer them and not to lose any occasion of feeling their sting,—this man may, with truth, be said to have made progress, and great progress, in the virtue of humility. Therefore, you will understand how absolute, how perfect is the humility which our holy Lawgiver requires of you; and, as a natural consequence, you must not spare any pains to make yourself thoroughly master of this fundamental virtue.

But, before speaking of it, we will preface that which we have to say with a few words of Gerson's:\* “For thoroughly grasping the deep lessons of true humility,” he says, “the unction of the Holy Spirit is far more efficacious than laborious study; humble prayer, than learned discussion; the ardent aspiration of the soul, than acuteness of intellect; and, more than everything else, the frequent meditation of Our Saviour’s Passion, made by a heart full of faith and love.” Hence, in your struggle to win the virtue of humility, you must with special care endeavour to carry out that advice which St. Benedict gives with respect to all

\* *Sermo ii. de Humil.*, consid. i.



our good works: "With most earnest prayer beseech God to complete, to perfect your own feeble attempts to begin that which is good."

Now, although we are unable to point out to you a more direct and more safe way for gaining true humility than is that of which our holy Father speaks in the seventh chapter of the Rule, when treating of the ladder which reaches up to heaven, by the ascent of which ladder he promises a sure and speedy acquisition of the greatest perfection, yet, because in another place\* and at considerable length, we have spoken concerning this way, we will not now delay you by attempting still more to elucidate the matter. We most earnestly exhort you always to exercise yourself in the practice of this virtue of humility; and when you think that you have done everything that it is possible for you to have done, look on yourself as an unprofitable servant who has done only that which it is his duty to do, and give all the glory of your actions to God. We will here put before you some few counsels, drawn from various parts of the Rule, with the hope that they may be of use to you in the practice of humility.

1. "When you see any good in yourself, attribute it to God and not to yourself."† Implant this advice deeply in your heart; for, if it take root there, you will hold as a truth which it is impossible to gainsay that, whatever you have and whatever you are able to do in the way of natural or of supernatural good, you have from God and you are able to do by the power of God; that if for a single moment He were to withdraw His concurrence, you would fall back into the nothingness from which you sprang; that unless He tempered the assaults which the devil makes against you and put a bridle on your own lusts, there is not any crime so abominable, any foul deed so execrable, of which you would not be guilty. If you be intimately persuaded of all this, will you not cry out with the Apostle: "What hast thou that thou hast not received, and if thou hast received, why dost thou

\* Retreat before Reception of the Habit—"The Postulant."

† Cap. iv., instr. 42.

glory as if thou hadst not received ?”\* Learn from this counsel to trace all good and all evil to the sources from which they respectively spring ; magnify God as the only author of that which is good in you ; give Him thanks for it and offer to Him glory, praise, and honour. As for yourself, acknowledge that you are nothing, that you are destitute of good, that you are weak and wretched. Plume not yourself on any good that may have been performed by you. Pursue not the shadow of human glory. St. Bernard speaks with great severity of those who take pride in anything else than in God only : “ Whatever honour you may gain which is not referred to God, that honour you steal from Him. For, from what source can any honour flow unto you who are but putrid dust ? Is it from your holiness of life ? But it is the Spirit that sanctifieth—not your spirit, but the Spirit of God. Is it from signs and wonders that are wrought by you ? They are the works, not of your hands, but of the power of God. Does the breath of popular flattery fan your cheek, because you have spoken well and eloquently ? It is Christ that has given you a mouth and wisdom ; for, what is your tongue but as a pen in the hand of him who writes. Even this pen is but lent to you.”† What would the Saint say if he saw a Novice, still smeared with the mire of a worldly life, hampered by evil habits, enslaved, perhaps, by unruly passions, and yet boasting of his noble birth, priding himself on the brilliancy of his talents and on the wide range of his knowledge, taking vain complacency in his imaginary excellence and dreaming of future honour and advancement ?

Cast off your borrowed plumes ; give to God the things that are God’s—namely, the good that you seem to possess—but to yourself restore all that is your own—that is to say, your own nothingness and whatever in you is evil. Unless with a sincere heart you do this, you will make God your adversary ; for, He resists the proud, and gives His grace to the humble. You make profession of humility, by wearing the monastic habit ; do not, then, defile that habit with the

\* 1 Cor. iv. 7.

† *Sermo xiii. in Cant.*

mire of pride ; for, nothing is more detestable than a proud Monk. "Though pride," says Peter of Blois, "is always and everywhere hateful, yet it assumes a character far more detestable when it is found in one who makes profession of humility ; for, what rust is in iron, what moths are in a garment, what gall is in milk, what poison is in honey, that pride is in one who wears the monastic habit."

2. "With tears and sighs daily in prayer confess to God your past evils, and amend them for the time to come."\* Among the many ways of exercising humility, this is an excellent one which has been sanctioned by the practice and the example of the Saints ; for, as the Wise Man says : "The just is first accuser of himself" ; † and St. Gregory : "The signs of true humility are, to know one's own iniquity, and, knowing it, to confess it."‡ Diametrically opposed to this way of practising humility is that vice which is ingrained in human nature, namely, the excuse and the defence of self. Accuse yourself, therefore, and avoid either defending or excusing yourself, for both these acts are destructive of humility ; and, although St. Benedict, in the above cited passage, seems to speak of self-accusation before God only, yet, in many other parts of the Rule, and particularly in the forty-sixth chapter, he makes special mention of self-accusation both in the sacred tribunal of Penance and out of it, for any sin or for any excess committed in any place whatsoever. Hence both kinds of accusation are necessary for the Novice. But, in order that this self-accusation may be real and not pretended, and that it may not be blackened with the smoke of pride, take notice that some persons accuse themselves, and that they are ready to be the first to accuse themselves, not in order that they may be humbled, but that they may be exalted.

Of these men St. Gregory says : "Their aim is to be honoured for the confession of their sin, not to be humbled. By self-accusation they wish to appear humble, but they do not desire in reality to be humble."§ Others accuse them-

\* *Reg.*, cap. iv., instr. 58.

† *Moral.*, lib. xxii., cap. xiii.

‡ *Prov.* xviii. 17.

§ *Ibid.*, lib. xxiv., cap. vi.



selves and acknowledge that they are sinners, but they do not wish to be regarded as sinners by those to whom they make this avowal. Of these men, the holy Doctor says: "They say that they are sinners, and yet they do not believe that they have sinned. For, it often happens that men will admit, in a general sort of way, that they are sinners; but when they hear other men who really believe them to be that which they say that they are, reprehending them for their sins, they defend themselves and strive to prove themselves just. Therefore, he who does this, does not speak the truth when he says that he has sinned; for, it is with his lips only and not with his inmost heart that he makes this confession. For, if by so doing he truly desired to be humble, he would never defend himself against those who reprove him for his sin." Others, again, accuse themselves when they are not in adversity, and when they have not any reason to fear punishment. Of these St. Gregory says: "It is a very easy thing for any one to confess that he is a sinner, when he does not incur any penalty for his sin. We may safely say that we are unjust, when we do not feel any chastisement for our injustice. For, we speak thus when all about us is peaceful and tranquil; but when we are scourged and corrected for our sin, then we break forth into murmurs."

According to St. Gregory, he also does not confess his sins who, when chastised for them, thinks that he is handled more severely than he deserves. So far is that man from attaining to true humility by these and by similar modes of self-accusation that, on the contrary, he runs great risk of daily sinking deeper into the mire of pride. Therefore, let not your accusation of your sins proceed from any other intention than from a true desire of advancing in humility; let not your words give the lie to the sentiments of your heart; and take it not amiss either that others should entertain about you ideas similar to those which you entertain about yourself, or that they should correct, and reprehend, and punish you. Say with Job: "I have sinned, and indeed I have offended, and I have not received what I have de-

served";\* and with St. Bernard: "I am prepared for stripes, knowing that I have received fewer by far than I have deserved. Let me be chastised as an evil doer, provided only that chastisement is reputed unto me as merit. Perchance He will have compassion on me, when I have been punished, since He cannot find in me anything to reward."† This is the safe way of attaining to solid humility and to true wisdom. Far from it are those persons who not only shrink from correction and from penance, shun them by every means in their power, and hate them with all the intensity of their soul, but, what is still worse, dislike those who administer the correction, despise them, and by sharp words, by ridicule, and by opprobrious language, exasperate them beyond the power of endurance.

Give ear to the words of the Wise Man: "He that loveth correction, loveth knowledge; but he that hateth reproof is foolish."‡ Cornelius à Lapide gives the meaning thus: "He who loves correction, and, whenever he commits a fault and wanders from the right path, suffers himself to be corrected, and gladly receives the correction, he truly loves the knowledge of morals,—that is to say, the beauty of virtue; and hence he is truly wise, is truly a philosopher or lover of wisdom. But the man who hates rebuke, and who, when he does amiss, suffers not himself to be corrected, that man is in very truth a fool: (1) Because he shows his pride and arrogance by thinking himself to be wiser than others are, and, in consequence of this thought, stolidly and haughtily defends his faults and defects. (2) Because he obstinately persists in his faults and defects, and desires neither instruction nor correction. (3) Because with the folly of a sick man, he neither admits that he is unwell, nor suffers a remedy of any kind to be administered to him. Therefore, as that man who misses his way, and who will not be led back to it, is a fool, so is he also a fool who, after departing from the way of salvation, will not suffer himself again to be directed to it, by means of correction and instruction." Hence, if you wish to gain true humility and the science of

\* Job xxxiii. 27.

† Sermo xlv. in Cantic.

‡ Prov. xii. 1.

salvation, attentively listen to, devoutly receive, and carefully preserve whatever will conduce to the salvation of your soul. Receive it not as the word of man, but as it truly is, the word of God. Let that word be attended to, not only when it consoles and warns, but when it rebukes.

3, "Honour all men. In honour prevent one another."\* These counsels deserve more attentive consideration than at first sight they appear to merit. We are of opinion, in fact, that the distance at which any one is living from true humility may be measured by the extent to which he carries his neglect of these apostolic precepts. For, as it is a characteristic mark of proud men to contemn others, to think little of them, and to boast as the Pharisee did that they are not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, and liars, so also is it a characteristic mark of the truly humble to show honour to all others. This honour, however, must be sincere, and not that merely superficial pretence of honour which we see manifested by those persons who are only acting a part. It has this quality of sincerity, when, as the Apostle admonishes: "Through humility, each esteems others to be better than himself."† But when you perceive that the lives of other men are not so perfect as they ought to be, and that their natural gifts are fewer in number than and of a quality inferior to your own, take care that these two circumstances are not to you stones of offence and rocks of scandal, by causing you to think that your neighbours are unworthy of that honour which we here recommend you to pay to them.

Beware of these stones! "He who shall fall upon them shall be broken; but upon whomsoever they shall fall, they shall grind him to powder." That so great a calamity may never happen to you, take special notice of these words of St. Theresa: "Let it be our aim always to turn our eyes to the virtues and the good qualities which we perceive in others; if we notice in them any defects, let us cover these defects with the mantle of our own sins; and thus, although we may not at first be able to do this with that perfection with which we ought to do it, yet, by degrees, we shall

\* *Reg.*, cap. v. 8; cap. lxxii.

† *Phil.* ii. 3.



acquire the great virtue of thinking that others are better than we are. In this way, by God's grace,—which is necessary for everything and without which all our diligence, how great soever it may be, is fruitless,—we shall begin to make some progress, if at the same time, we be careful to ask God to grant this virtue to us. For, He does not abandon any one that on his part uses all diligence.”\*

Hence, a certain Abbot was accustomed to say: “Humility has not any tongue with which to speak of others as either negligent or proud; it has not any eyes with which to see their faults; or any ears with which to hear that which would not benefit its own soul; in fine, it has nothing to do with anything, save with its own sins.” Would that you could carry into effect these excellent precepts which you read! But you will doubtlessly carry them into effect if, in consequence of frequent meditation on those which we have written for your edification, you behave respectfully, humbly, and kindly towards those with whom you live; if your conduct be such that, by your acts, your words, and your bearing, you manifest the esteem, the love, and the honour in which you hold them.

Also, it will be of great assistance to you, in cultivating this spirit, if you make some pious aspiration of esteem for the persons whom you may chance to meet, saying: “Lord! I am not worthy to loose the latchet of this Thy servant's shoes. Oh, how many virtues does he possess of which I am destitute! Blessed be God Who has deigned to let me share in the company of His faithful servants!” Let the following words of St. Bernard bring this chapter to a close: “Do not make any comparisons between yourself and others with respect to virtue. For, how do you know whether he whom you consider to be the most worthless and most wicked of men, of whose life you have a horror, as most foul, and on whom you therefore look as worthy of your scorn, and not only of your scorn, who are now living soberly, and justly, and piously, but of the scorn of even the reprobate—how know you whether one day he will not

\* *Vita*, cap. xiii.

be far more virtuous than you are, owing to the change which the right hand of the Most High will work in him; how know you whether even now he is not actually your superior in virtue? Therefore, God has willed us not to choose a *good* place, or the *last* place but one, or a place *among* the last: 'Sit down,' He says, 'in the *lowest* place,' that only you may sit last, may prefer yourself to none, and that you may not presume even to compare yourself with others. Behold how great an evil springs from ignorance of ourselves! It is none other than the sin of the devil—pride, the beginning of evil."\*

\* *Sermo xxxvii. in Cant.*

## CHAPTER VII

THAT ALL THE RIGOUR AND THE AUSTERITY BY WHICH WE  
TEND TOWARDS GOD BE LAID BEFORE THE NOVICE

THIS injunction may seem to lack somewhat of that superhuman discretion for which our holy Father and Lawgiver is justly held in so high esteem. For, who will not be filled with alarm, if, immediately after his conversion to God and his escape from the allurements of the world, there be put before him all the rigour and the austerity of the new life which he has embraced? Would it not be far more discreet to speak to him of the sweetness, the joy, the repose which are to be gained in due time, and by so speaking to smooth away much of the asperity naturally to be looked for in the Novitiate? Would not this line of policy be far more likely to inspire him with courage to persevere in his arduous undertaking? This is, no doubt, the view of men who savour earthly things rather than the things that are Christ's; who are seeking for a broad and easy way to heaven, instead of the narrow and rugged one pointed out by Our Lord. They take it for granted that whatever is burdensome and disagreeable to sensitive nature, must be opposed to discretion.

Far different, however, is the judgment which holy and spiritual men form on these matters. Different, also, is the judgment formed by Our Lord Who is the Saint of Saints, the Eternal Wisdom of God. To those who came to Him and wished to be enrolled among the number of His followers, He did not preach that which is soft and pleasant to nature. For, what says the Scripture? "Jesus said to all: If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself,



and take up his Cross daily and follow Me. For, whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and, he that shall lose his life for My sake shall save it.”\* In St. Matthew, He says: “Behold, I send you as sheep in the midst of wolves . . . they will deliver you up in their Councils; they will scourge you in their Synagogues; you will be brought before Governors and before Kings for My sake . . . you will be hated by all men for My name’s sake.”† In imitation of the divine Master, our holy Lawgiver commands that, to those who come to ask admission to his Order, there shall be preached all that is most rigorous and austere, for which proceeding two reasons are assigned. These reasons it will be advantageous for you to know before we proceed any farther.

The first reason is, to dispose his children at the very outset to enter with a resolute mind on the royal way of the Cross; and, by so doing, to lay in their hearts a solid foundation on which to erect the structure of their spiritual life. He who leaves the Novitiate without being firmly built up in the love of the Cross, exposes himself to the very serious danger of falling away; for, since virtue consists in that which it is difficult to do, and since the way of perfection is narrow, unless the beginner know these facts thoroughly well beforehand, he will hardly be able to persevere amid the difficulties which daily and hourly spring up around him. Moreover, the thorns and the briers of adversity and persecution, from which the path of those who wish to lead a godly life in Christ Jesus is never free, will choke the good seed which was sown during the Novitiate, but which did not fall on a good soil capable of bringing forth fruit in patience. Read attentively the eleventh and twelfth chapters of the Second Book of the *Following of Christ*, and you will find not only the truth of what we have here stated, but many other admirable sentiments which will aid you very materially to conceive a great love of the holy Cross.

The second reason is that which St. Gregory adduces, to explain why Our Lord, in a similar case, when preaching

\* St. Luke ix. 23.

† St. Matth. x. 19.

to the people, spoke to them of wars and seditions: "Our Lord and Saviour foretells the evils which, in the destruction of the world, are to befall men, in order that, when these misfortunes do actually come to pass, they may cause His disciples less trouble, from the fact of being foreknown. For, less grievous is the blow that is foreseen than that of which we know nothing until it has fallen; and the ills of life are more easily endured when, by means of prudent forethought, we are able to prepare ourselves with resignation to meet and to bear them."\* In precisely the same way our holy Father, by previously telling his disciples of the trials which are sure to come, thereby arms them against those trials, in order that, when the blow does actually fall, they may not be either disturbed or disheartened. Hence, it is evident that those who think that there is some indiscretion in the words of our holy Father, are egregiously mistaken; for, as every one must admit, the man who discloses to the traveller the intricate windings of the way and the perils which he may incur from robbers, is far more discreet than the man who, through fear of alarming the wayfarer, carefully conceals from him all danger; for, in this latter case, the peril is discovered only when it is actually upon him, and that, too, to his own irreparable loss.

Therefore, expect not at any future time to find in the Order which you intend to embrace, the favours and the delights of the world, but rather those tribulations and crosses by which God in various wonderful ways cleanses His beloved children from sin, builds up in them an edifice of solid virtue, increases their store of merit, and prepares for them a crown of heavenly glory. Know that the Religious State is a state of afflictions and crosses. "A Monastery," says St. Chrysostom, "is a house of mourning."† For this reason the Fathers call Religious "*Crucifixi*," or "the crucified." For, if men of the world—as we have before remarked—are ordered by Christ daily to take up and to carry their cross, with much greater reason are Religious obliged to do so; for, they may in very truth say

\* *Hom. xxxv. in Evangel.*

† *Hom. lix. ad Pop. Constantin.*

with the Apostle: "We are crucified unto the world, and the world is crucified unto us."\* Know also that the present life is not the time for rest, but for labour, and that God promises the crown of glory, not to those who are idle and listless, but to those who do violence to themselves, struggle manfully against their passions, and overcome them: "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and only the violent bear it away."† "He shall not be crowned unless he strive lawfully."‡ "To him that overcometh I will give the hidden manna and a new name."§

Understand well that better times will not come for you; that no attention whatever must be paid to those who by various promises endeavour to persuade you that in Religious Life you will find many things very pleasing to self-love and to bodily ease. Close your ears against their words; listen not to the voice of these charmers; turn away your eyes and look not on their vanity. Attend to the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking to you and in the words of the Wise Man exhorting you: "My son, walk not with them; restrain thy foot from their paths."|| "Son, when thou comest to the service of God, stand in justice and in fear, and prepare thy soul for temptation."¶ St. Augustine, connecting these words with the text of the 83rd Psalm, on which he is commenting, says: "Because the Wise Man says: 'My son, when thou comest to the service of God, stand in fear and prepare thy soul for temptation,' let him who approaches the service of God understand that he is coming to the winepress; he will be torn; he will be trodden underfoot; he will be crushed; not that he may perish in this world, but that, as the precious juice of the vine does, he may flow from the press into celestial wine-vessels."

While speaking on this subject, we commend to your special attention *The Prognosticon*, a work written by the Venerable Blossius. It is one that is usually put in the hands of Novices, because it places before them the chief

\* Galat. vi. 14.  
§ Apoc. ii. 17.

† St. Matth. xi. 12.  
|| Prov. i. 15.

‡ Tim. ii. 5.  
¶ Ecclus. ii. 1.



difficulties to be met with in Religious Life. But lest those who have only recently begun that life, and who are still weak in virtue, should waver in their vocation in consequence of what we have said and should begin to think that, if the way of Religious Life be so narrow, it would be better to remain in the world, let them attentively read these words of St. Bernard: "It is but right and just that you should suffer, and die, and that you should be buried with Him Who has suffered, and died, and Who has been buried. For, he who says that he is a member of Christ ought to remain in Christ, and as Christ walked so ought he also to walk. For, on account of the Cross it has been said of the elect: 'They that are Christ's have crucified their flesh with its vices and concupiscences.' Therefore, let Christ our Lord spiritually come to us and enter our hearts, just in the state in which He was during His Passion—betrayed, sold by a disciple, bought by the Jews as a worthless slave for thirty pieces of silver, taken prisoner, dragged along the streets, bound like a man without help, His back torn with scourges, His side opened with a spear, His hands pierced, His feet bored through, giving Himself without a struggle to His murderers, patiently bowing His head to the blows of the strikers as if it was as insensible to pain as an anvil is under the smith's hammer, while all the time He is paying to rapacious pirates the ransom of His bitter death for us who are to be carried from our land of exile across the stormy sea of this life into our blessed fatherland."\* Oftentimes during your meditation reflect on considerations such as these; firmly fix them in your heart; and you will learn by experience with how great ardour the love of the Cross is able to inflame the soul of man. With a certain great lover of the Cross, you will cry out: "O good Cross, long wished for and now prepared for a soul that eagerly desires thee, with great security and joy I come to thee; do thou also with exultation receive me, the disciple of Him Who hung upon thee."†

But you may, perchance, say: "If there is any truth in

\* *Sermo de Cæna Dom.*

† St. Andrew, the Apostle

that which I have just read, why does our holy Father himself, towards the end of the Prologue to his Rule, console his wavering disciple with the hope of better things which are to follow, when the difficulties of the beginning have been overcome?" These are his words: "But if in some things we proceed with a little severity—sound reason so advising for the amendment of vices and the preservation of charity—do not straightway, for fear thereof, flee from the way of salvation which is always strait and difficult in the beginning. But, in process of time and by long continuance in this holy course and method of life, when the heart has once been enlarged, the way of God's commandments is run with unspeakable sweetness of love." At the end of the seventh chapter a somewhat similar promise is made by him. In reply to this question, we say that these words of St. Benedict are so far from being in opposition to the mind of the holy Legislator, that, in every respect, they are in exact accord with it. For, to those who persevere in good, he promises consolation; but it is none other than that which faith and a sincere love of God are able to procure for the soul; not that which the world, corrupt nature, and Religious, who by their wicked lives still cling to the world, promise themselves and look for in vain. The one kind of consolation is true and solid; the other is false, empty, and productive of naught save affliction of spirit. We do not forbid you to solace yourself with consolation that is true and solid; we most earnestly exhort you to sigh after it, to seek it in your Religious Life and to wait for it with patience. We are far from saying that the good Religious will never, during the whole course of his life, taste any solid peace, any repose, any joy and tranquillity. But what we do say and what we wish deeply to imprint on the minds of those who have but recently come to Religious Life is, that peace, repose, joy, and solid tranquillity are to be sought for and to be found in nothing else than in the love of the Cross. This love is the characteristic mark of the true follower of Jesus Christ. Hence those sayings which are so startling to the ears of worldly-minded men:

"I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulation."\*  
 "Count it all joy, when you shall fall into divers temptations."† "Either to suffer or to die. To suffer, but not to die."

That this is the very temper of our holy Father's mind is evident from the words which we have cited and from those with which he concludes the Prologue. For, in the words which have been cited, he mentions no other joy and no other sweetness than the joy and the sweetness which spring from perfect charity, having its roots in a living faith; but it is certain that one who is animated with a charity such as this does not flee from the Cross; he loves it as the Apostles did, "who went from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus."‡ The words with which our holy Father concludes his Prologue are as follows: "So that, never departing from His School, but persevering in the Monastery in His doctrine until death, we now share, by patience, in the sufferings of Christ, that afterwards we may deserve to be partakers of His Kingdom." These words, joined with those which precede them, signify that, in this life, we shall run the way of God's commandments with unspeakable sweetness of love, and that we shall be partakers of the Kingdom of God in the life to come, if, with faith and with unshaken constancy, we persevere until death in the doctrine of Christ and in the participation of His Passion. To confirm us in this belief, we have the words of the Apostle: "As you are partakers of the suffering, so shall you be also of the consolation."§ "If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him."||

Besides the work of Blossius, already mentioned, a work which treats of those trials for which you must prepare your soul, you may with advantage consult Lancisius,¶ who divides these *dura et aspera* into three classes; and, quoting Balthasar Alvarez, observes that there are five sources of

\* 2 Cor. vii. 4.  
 § 2 Cor. i. 7.

† St. James i. 2.  
 || 2 Tim. ii. 12.

‡ Acts v. 41  
 ¶ Opusc. iii., cap. v.



patience. De Ponte teaches a similar doctrine.\* All that these great masters say on this subject may be summed up under ten heads: (1) Injuries inflicted by the elements, such as cold, heat, tempests. (2) Bodily troubles and inconveniences which happen to us on every side, from sickness, or from the want of necessities. (3) Other men's manners which are different from our own; also their physical and their moral defects. (4) Ignominy, contempt, injuries. (5) Afflictions of spirit, in matters which pertain to the divine service, as, for instance, aridities, scruples, the molestations of the devil, illusions. (6) Bodily necessities, such as hunger, thirst, disease, sadness, weariness. (7) Injuries inflicted by creatures. (8) Spiritual necessities, such as ignorance, darkness of mind, involuntary distractions, forgetfulness, passions, inclination to evil. (9) Temptations arising from the flesh, the devil, etc. (10) Public calamities arising from heresy, rebellion, conflagrations, etc.

The best way to prepare yourself meritoriously to bear, both during and after your Novitiate, these and similar ills, is a continual and actual exercise of patience, whenever any occasion of suffering presents itself. At such moments as these, closing your eyes to the causes which inflict pain, whether these causes are rational or only material, raise to God your mind illuminated by the light of faith, and remember that with infinite wisdom, justice, and holiness, He directs each occurrence for His own glory and for your advantage both temporal and eternal. Strengthened by this thought, adore His all-wise providence, and trusting in the help of God, commit yourself wholly to Him. If you cannot with a joyous mind subject yourself to Him, do so with a mind that is at least willing, being assured that he who neglects this daily exercise of patience and satisfies himself with resolving to be patient at some future period, is hoping for that which will never come to pass. As the Prophet Osee says: "He sows the wind, and he shall reap the whirlwind." Also, Our Lord: "He sows upon a rock, and because he has not any root, in the time of temptation

\* *Perfect. Christ.*, tom. iii., tract. 5.

and of adversity he will fall away." Therefore, whatsoever your hand is able to do, from this time forth do it earnestly. Daily exercise yourself in patience, in the many opportunities which will never fail to present themselves. Turn not aside, and flee not from them; for, patience is won, not by flight, but by manful endurance. "Await on God with patience," as the Holy Ghost by the mouth of the Wise Man exhorts you. "Join yourself to Him, by the consideration of His loving foresight in all things, and endure, that your life may be increased in the latter end."\* Accept everything that befalls you, no matter whence it may come; endure in sorrow, and in your humility have patience; for, gold is tried in the fire, but acceptable men are proved in the crucible of humiliation.

However, you must bear in mind that in those misfortunes which have in them any offence against God, which either expose you to the danger of offending Him, or dispose you to do so, you must keep your patience in such a way as to employ all suitable means for hindering Him from being offended; for, otherwise your endurance will not be meritorious; it will be prejudicial to you. In all other matters in which there is not any such danger to be apprehended, as, for instance, in sickness, or in any misfortune of a similar kind, natural means are to be employed in such a way that, whether they succeed or fail, too great anxiety and internal perturbation may be avoided, and the issue, of whatever nature it may be, be left entirely to the disposition of the divine will. As for matters which lie completely beyond your power, such, for instance, as bad weather, rain, floods, storms, and the like, you must acquiesce in the arrangements of divine Providence which, by means of natural causes, wisely regulates and governs all things; and yet the Church's prayers, recited for the purpose of warding off these evils, may, without any detriment to the virtue of patience, be used, but in the spirit of resignation to whatsoever it may please Our good God to appoint.

\* *Ecclus. ii. 3.*

## CHAPTER VIII

### OF THE WORDS: "AND IF HE PROMISE STABILITY AND PERSEVERANCE"

IT is certain that these words cannot be understood of the promise of monastic stability which the Novice makes at his profession. Of this solemn engagement mention is made farther on in this same chapter, in the words: "When they admit him to profession, he shall, in the presence of all, make a promise before God and His Saints, of stability."\* It is the opinion of a celebrated author that, in our holy Father's time, a contract was usually made between the Novice and the Community: the Novice promised not to leave them without a sufficient reason; and the Community, not to dismiss him without a grave cause. However that may have been, some such form of contract seems to be quite in accordance with the spirit of the Rule; and, although nothing certain can be determined about the matter, yet we may venture to give an opinion on the subject.†

It seems to us that in this passage our holy Father intended: First, to caution the Novice against presuming to ask for or to retain the Religious habit, when he knows

\* Cap. lviii.

† Of whatever nature this promise of Stability may have been, it must of necessity have followed the laws which regulate other promises, that is to say, it must in certain circumstances have been revocable. Against this it may be objected that the contract between the Novice and the Community is not a gratuitous one, since the Novice on the strength of it receives food, clothing, and the rest. To this we answer: He receives food, clothing, etc., with an intention on the part of the donor to bind him,—denied; without any such intention,—granted. Hence the contract remains a purely gratuitous one, and therefore it is revocable at will.



full well that on account of some secret, substantial impediment—such as a notable defect in body, in health, etc.—he cannot with a safe conscience make his profession. For, by entering the Novitiate, he deceives the Community who, naturally enough, do not wish to admit to, or to keep any persons in probation, except those of whose perseverance they entertain a reasonable hope.

Secondly, against taking the habit with the intention of not persevering, even though there may not be any substantial defect to hinder perseverance. He who enters the Monastery in this way, does not enter by the gate; he is a thief and robber; for, to say nothing of the other evils which spring from his conduct, he steals the goods of the Monastery by consuming them against the will of the Community and, in a spiritual way, murders his own soul.

Thirdly, against acting in such a way as to merit expulsion from the Monastery on account of his bad behaviour. It is not to be expected that, as Jonas did, he will find a great fish in the stormy sea of a worldly life, ready to bear him into a place of safety. It is far more probable that, as Pharaoh was, he will be swallowed by its foaming billows, to his own irreparable loss.

Fourthly, against casting off the Religious habit, through mere levity of mind and without a sufficient reason. For, although it is not absolutely and directly a mortal sin to turn a deaf ear to God Who calls you to the Religious Life—except indeed in a certain case—yet, for many reasons, absolutely and always it is a very dangerous thing to do.\* The fearful examples brought forward by the author to whose pages we refer you are very applicable to these our times. They ought to make you wary of putting your hand to the plough, and hinder you from withdrawing your hand, without a grave reason, lest by so doing you should render yourself unworthy of the Kingdom of God. No words are strong enough to condemn the wickedness of those who, not content with deserting the ranks of Religion, do the devil's work by trying to induce others to desert with them. To

\* P. Dirkinck, *Fund. Vitæ æter.*, cap. iii.

these men deservedly may be addressed the words of Our divine Lord: "Woe to that man by whom scandal cometh! It were better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the depth of the sea."\*

As we have spoken of stability, a few words will not be out of place concerning perseverance. St. Gregory says: "Good is done to no purpose, if the doing of it is abandoned before the end of our mortal life. For, he who runs swiftly, runs in vain if he ceases to run before he has reached the goal." Therefore, it is said of the reprobate: "Woe to them that have lost patience."† Hence, He Who is Truth itself says to His chosen ones: "You are they who have continued with Me in My temptations."‡

In our opinion three things are necessary to secure any one's perseverance in his vocation. If these things be properly employed, he will not through his own fault abandon his Order; nor has any one that has made use of them ever yet looked back and become unfit for the Kingdom of God. The first is prayer; the second is a great esteem of the Religious vocation; the third is a careful observance of all those practices of which we have already spoken, when treating of truly seeking God and of being prompt for the "Work of God," for obedience, for reproach, that is to say, for the exercise of patience and humility.

Prayer has been instituted by God as a means to obtain all good things, according to that: "Ask, and it shall be given you;"§ "Your Father from heaven will give the good spirit to them that ask Him."|| Perseverance, however, not only is good in itself, but is the completion of all other good things and the peculiar gift of God. It follows, therefore, that prayer is one of the chief, one of the necessary means to obtain perseverance. Therefore, frequently lift your heart to God, and with humble confidence beseech Him, through His infinite loving kindness, to bestow this gift on you, invoking, for this purpose, the aid of the glorious Virgin Mary, Mother of God—the special Patroness

\* *St. Luke* xvii. 1.

† *Ecclus.* ii. 16.

‡ *St. Luke* xxii. 28.

§ *St. Matth.* vii. 7.

|| *St. Luke* xi. 13.

of our Order, through whom God has willed us to obtain all things; of St. Benedict; and of the other Saints, concerning whose worship and veneration we refer you to an excellent work entitled *Internal Life with God*.\*

With respect to esteem for one's vocation, to thanksgiving for this singular favour, and to the motives which are best adapted for exciting these sentiments in one's soul, since illustrious authors have written on all these points, and particularly Jerome Plat, in his book on the *Excellence of the Religious State*; Nadasi, on the *Life and the Manners of the Predestined*; Humbert, on *Contempt of the World*; we commend you to the study of their works. We will content ourselves with simply exhorting you never to be either sluggish or indifferent in the performance of these duties; for, sluggishness and indifference would show that you are ungrateful to God; and ingratitude, as you know so well, is a hateful thing in His eyes and the forerunner of a total abandonment of His service.

Therefore, never suffer a day or an hour to pass without offering to Our good God, sometimes by short ejaculations, at others by longer prayers, your sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. "For, not to all is it granted to forsake all, to renounce the world, and to take on them the Monastic Life."† If the chapter from which these words are quoted be frequently read by you and committed to memory, it will supply an abundance of loving aspirations, admirably adapted for this purpose. There is one piece of advice which, while endeavouring to excite in your heart a high esteem for your vocation, we deem it fitting to give to you, and it is this: never in thought, or in word, or in writing, to make little of any other Religious Order, or State, or Institute, but on all occasions to think, to speak, and to write about them with honour and with praise. We have already, in another place, spoken on this subject; but we here repeat our words, and we would wish, for weighty reasons which need not be mentioned, over and over again

\* By Father Anselm Fischer.

† *Following of Christ*, bk. iii., chap. x.



to repeat them. In fact, an exact observance of those precepts which we have given about truly seeking God, about eagerness for the "Work of God," for obedience, and for humiliation, is the surest safeguard of perseverance. This conclusion is proved by the daily experience of those who, by their own fault, abandon Religious Life. For, they come to this unhappy pass, in consequence of having without a good intention entered Religion. They began imperceptibly to grow weary of those things which pertain to the service of God and the perfection of their interior man; to omit them; to disobey; to refuse to humble themselves. Hence it was that, in preceding chapters, we often repeated that certain characteristics are indications of failure in the Religious Life, on the part of those persons who are marked with them. For the same reason we strongly insisted on this exact observance, in order that you might the more carefully avoid the faults on which we commented, and that you might not run the risk of losing your calling to this holy State, and of imperilling the eternal salvation of your immortal soul.

From all that has been said, you will now have a sufficiently clear notion of that which our holy Father means by the words: "If he promise stability and perseverance." We will, therefore, in the following chapter, call your attention to other matters which seem to require explanation.

## CHAPTER IX

### OF THRICE READING THE RULE

"That thrice during the year—namely, in the second, the eighth, and the twelfth month of the Novitiate—the Rule be read to him, that he may know unto what he has come."

ALTHOUGH this ordinance of our holy Father, concerning the reading of the Rule three times during the course of the year, has reference to the Novice Master rather than to the Novice, yet, because all the efforts of the Master will be futile unless the Novice bring with him a docile heart, it will be very much for your advantage rightly to understand and duly to carry into effect, those precepts which are useful and necessary for thoroughly imbibing the spirit of the Holy Rule. In the first place, you must entertain a very great esteem for the Holy Rule. It was written by him who, as St. Gregory says, was full of the spirit of all the just; of whom St. Hildegarde says: "The lessons which our holy Father St. Benedict teaches were written in fear and in love, in charity and in chastity, so that nothing must either be added to them or be taken from them; for, they are not deficient in any respect, since they are the work of the Holy Spirit."\*

Pluck out of your soul that most pernicious idea, if it should chance to have taken root there, to wit, that the Rule cannot, and that it ought not to be observed in these our times. Strongly fortify yourself against ever suffering this notion to gain a foothold in your mind; for, if it should do so, what advantage can you ever reap from repeatedly reading the Rule, and from listening to the explanations

\* *Comment in Reg.*

which are given of its various chapters? You will look on all its enactments as having been commendable, indeed, in former times, but as being quite unsuitable for the days in which we live. Consequently, you will not be at any pains to try to carry them into effect. Any one may see at a glance how absurd is conduct such as this and how subversive of our Order, of regular observance and of religious discipline. Understand, therefore, and hold it as a certain fact that, we have chosen for our Legislator the same St. Benedict that our Fathers and predecessors for many ages had as their Master and Ruler. We have the same Rule and the same obligation to observe it—as far, at least, as the matter of the virtues is concerned—that they had, with the exception, perhaps, of some few accidental matters not pertaining to the essence of Religious Life, which matters have been either changed or completely dispensed with by lawful authority or by custom.

Look on the least observance of the Holy Rule, or on the slightest transgression of it, as a matter of great moment. Do not put off till after your profession the practice of that which is contained in the Rule, and particularly of those matters which have reference to the vows and the virtues. To do this would be an exceedingly great mistake. For, since the year of probation is given to you to try yourself, to test yourself by actual experience, to exercise yourself, and to acquire a habit of those virtues which you will be obliged to practise after your profession, what good, we ask, can you hope from yourself after taking the vows, if during the whole Novitiate you have acted, with respect to the virtues which the vows impose on you, as if they were matters with which you were not in any way concerned? Therefore, if after your profession you desire to make progress in perfection and to ward off the dangers which beset those who, during their Novitiate, have acted in the way which we have described, be careful during your year of probation to imbue your mind with the spirit of your holy Order. You will effect this, if you learn to perform your duties in the spirit of the Rule. To facilitate this, we will here lay before



you a brief digest of it, adapted to our modern distribution of time; and to this digest we will add a few remarks concerning the matter of the vows.

### A BRIEF DIGEST OF THE RULE.

First of all, whatever good work you begin, beg of Him with most earnest prayer, to perfect (Prol.). (2) In all things glorify God and truly seek Him (Cap. 57 and 58). (3) Do everything in the spirit of obedience and of humility (Cap. 5 and 7); with a good mind, that is, with a mind spiritually joyous, tranquil, resigned; and with a serene countenance, because God loveth a cheerful giver (Cap. 5). Also, let your actions be done at suitable hours, observing the proper distribution of time (Cap. 31 and 48), with external modesty (Cap. 7) and, with careful remembrance of the divine presence (Cap. 4 and 7).

MATINS.—Having risen without delay, gently encourage\* your fellow Novices to hasten to the “Work of God;” but yet with all gravity and modesty (Cap. 12).

PSALMODY.—You must reflect in what manner you ought to comport yourself in the sight of God and of His holy Angels. Always be mindful of that saying of the Prophet: “Serve ye the Lord in fear.” Again; “Sing ye wisely;” and, “In the sight of the Angels I will sing unto Thee.” “So sing in choir, that mind and voice may be in accord” (Cap. 19). Let the Cantors and the Readers perform their respective duties in such a way as to edify those who hear them. Let those whom the Abbot shall order to undertake these offices perform them with humility, with gravity, and with reverential fear (Cap. 47). The verse: “O Lord! incline unto mine aid,” must be uttered with particular devotion, because it is a petition for the divine assistance and an offering of the whole psalmody of the Divine Office to the Blessed Trinity (Cap. 9). At the “Our Father,” and particularly when it is said at Lauds and at Vespers, while you repeat that petition, in which you pray that your

\* This encouragement is given by the Monk who wakens the brethren; for, he says to each: *Benedicamus Domino*.

trespasses may be forgiven, you must cleanse your soul from every blemish that is, in any way, opposed to the virtue of fraternal charity (Cap. 13). Each "Glory be to the Father" must either be said or be listened to with the greatest possible reverence, both internal and external (Cap. 9). The Holy Gospel must be heard while, out of respect and reverential fear, all the Brethren remain standing (Cap. 11). He who comes late, and he who while reciting either a Psalm or any other portion of the Sacred Liturgy makes a mistake, must do penance for it, in the manner which is prescribed (Cap. 43 and 45).

AFTER MATINS.—When the "Work of God" is finished, all shall silently leave the Oratory; but before leaving, each shall bow reverently, adoring and giving thanks to God (Cap. 52). What has been said, thus far, about Matins or the Night Watches, must be observed also in the rest of the Canonical Hours, which are recited during the day.

MEDITATION.—"If, when we wish to make some suggestion to the powerful, we presume not to speak to them, except with humility and reverence, with how much greater reason ought we with humility and purity of devotion to present our supplications to the Lord God of all." Let us bear in mind that we shall be heard, not for our many words, but for our purity of heart and for our penitential tears (Cap. 20).

That is to say, we must pray with affection of heart rather than with a multiplicity of words and of ideas; because the fruit of prayer consists chiefly in the action of the will by which pious affections and good resolutions general as well as particular are produced, and humble and fervent supplications are made to God, to bestow grace to carry into effect these resolutions, and to grant the petitions which we make for favours both for ourselves and for others.

1. As soon as you hear the signal which summons you to Prime and the other "Hours," lay aside that occupation in which you chance to be engaged and repair to the Choir with all speed, and yet with gravity of gait and demeanour, in order that no occasion may be given for light behaviour.

2. Let nothing be preferred to the "Work of God."

3. Let no one seek exemptions from monastic observance, but let each leave all things to the arrangement and the will of Superiors. This is evidently the mind of St. Benedict, as we may see from what he says in the fiftieth chapter of the Rule.

4. When the "Hours" are recited out of Choir, they ought with reverential fear to be said on bended knees, and at the times appointed for them.\* What has been said with respect to psalmody and to mental prayer ought to be applied to all other prayers, if we desire rightly to quit ourselves of them.

CHAPTER OF FAULTS.—The forty-sixth chapter must be observed by those who, in any way whatever, are guilty of faults. They must, of their own accord, by self-accusation make satisfaction for them. This accusation ought not to be made out of mere custom, but with real, internal compunction of heart, with a desire of satisfying God for the faults which we have committed and of doing better for the future. The same observations will hold good of all private self-accusation made before your Master.

DAILY OCCUPATIONS, such as spiritual reading, manual labour, and the duties imposed on each by Superiors.

1. Idleness is an enemy of the soul; therefore, it must be avoided (Cap. 48).

2. St. Benedict orders that the slothful Brother who gives himself up to idleness or to foolish talking and neglects his reading, should be rebuked and punished in such a way as to inspire the rest with fear (Cap. 48).

3. One Brother is not to associate with another at unreasonable times (Cap. 48).

4. Monks ought to keep silence at all times (Cap. 42).

5. That which is said of artisans must be understood also of those who are employed in study, or in any other work for the advantage of the Monastery,—they are to exercise their art, to pursue their researches, to fulfil their duties when they receive an order from the Abbot to do so (Cap. 57).

\* To say the "Hours" kneeling is by no means obligatory.



From this enactment we may gather that a Benedictine Monk may not occupy himself according to his own caprice, but according to the wishes and the direction of his Superiors. St. Benedict intimates as much in many other passages: "But if any of these artisans, etc., is proud of the skill which he hath in his craft, because he thereby seemeth to gain something for the Monastery, let him be removed from that craft, and let him not again exercise it unless, after humbling himself, the Abbot shall permit him." From these words you may see in what detestation pride is held by our holy Father. Therefore, beware of it and so ground yourself in humility, as never at any time to think that, by reason of your noble birth, or your wealth, or your knowledge, you have conferred, or you actually do confer, any benefit on the Monastery, and consequently that you stand high above others. If you entertain any such ideas as these, St. Benedict will not acknowledge you as his son; you will not have any part with him; but he will pluck you out and remove you from your dwelling-place, in order that, through very shame, you may be led to do penance. But, unless you abandon your pride and truly humble yourself, you will not escape that confusion of face which will last for ever: "If you do well, shall you not receive; but, if ill, shall not sin forthwith be present at the door?" "The lust thereof shall be under you; and you shall have dominion over it." \*

EATING AND DRINKING.—As soon as the signal for meals is heard, all shall hasten to obey it, in order that all may say the "Grace," and sit down to table together. He who, through negligence and his own fault, does not obey this call, must be corrected and he must make atonement for his want of obedience. No one must presume to eat or to drink either before or after the appointed times (Cap. 43). Let the greatest silence be kept at table, so that neither muttering, nor voice be heard there, except the voice of the Reader (Cap. 38). Care must be taken to avoid excess in eating or in drinking, in order that all surfeiting may be hindered; because there is not any sin that is more opposed

\* Gen. iv. 7.

to the profession of a Christian than gluttony. Hence Our Lord says: "Take heed to yourselves lest perhaps your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness" (Cap. 39). Our holy Father's enactment with respect to the quantity of food, to wit, that two dishes should suffice, so that he who cannot eat of the one, may make his meal of the other, must be understood to mean that, if there should be more than two, the Monks are not to take more of them than they need or than nature requires; and thus the pleasing sacrifice of abstinence may be offered to God.

With respect to abstinence from flesh meat, since a legitimate dispensation has been granted to eat it on certain days, our duty is to repress any inordinate desire of this kind of fare; and whenever we may do so without singularity, to be more abstemious with respect to it and particularly when it consists of any sort of delicacy. As for the fasts which are prescribed by Rule, each may lawfully accommodate himself to the place or to the Monastery in which he lives. He, however, who desires to be an exact observer of the Holy Rule, may, without singularity, be more abstemious at table on those days on which our holy Father prescribes fasts by Rule; he may take less of the dishes set before him than he would take if the fast had not been prescribed.

In speaking of drink, our holy Father permits the use of wine, but with these reservations:

1. That we do not drink unto satiety, but sparingly: "for wine maketh even the wise to fall away."

2. That, if the poverty of the place in which we live will not allow the appointed measure to be given, but much less, or perhaps even none at all, we should give God thanks and we should not murmur; for he warns us above all things to avoid murmuring.

3. That if God has bestowed on us the gift of abstinence, we should give Him thanks and should look forward to receive the special reward of this self-denial (Cap. 40).

The Brother who goes forth on any errand and intends to return on that same day to the Monastery, must not, while

abroad, presume to eat, even though invited by any one to do so, unless, indeed, he has an order to that effect from the Abbot (Cap. 51).

**SERVERS AND READERS.—1.** On Sunday, the outgoing and the incoming officers for the week shall cast themselves on their knees before all the rest, and shall ask to be prayed for (Cap. 35). This petition should be made with sincere affection of heart and according to the customary rite.

2. The Brethren are to serve one another and no one must be exempted from this service, unless he is hindered by sickness or by some other work of greater profit; because great reward is gotten thence. Hence, exemptions are to be avoided with all care, but especially exemptions willingly sought for through some pretext.

3. The Brethren are with all charity to serve one another (Cap. 35).

4. Let them so serve one another, that no one need ask for anything (Cap. 39).

5. Let the Reader so perform his task as to edify his hearers. With respect to taking some little refreshment before either reading or serving, this is an indulgence which our holy Father permits, but he does not command us to make use of it.

**AFTER MEALS.**—Let all the Brethren together say the Verse, that is, the Grace after meals; and let them devoutly do this, and not through mere custom.

**MUTUAL INTERCOURSE AND CONVERSATION.**—Because the danger of committing sin and of falling into dissipation is especially great in the performance of these two last-named duties, our holy Father, with watchful solicitude, takes measures which, with the aid of God's grace, will keep his children safe from harm. We will suggest to you the chief of these, and if you make a proper use of them, your conversation will be pleasing to God and acceptable to men. Strive to keep with special care the following precepts drawn from the chapter which treats of the "instruments" of good works:—

1. Love your neighbour as you love yourself. Honour all



men. Do not to another that which you would not that another should do to you. Forsake not charity. Do not any injury, but patiently bear any injury that is done to you. Keep your mouth from evil and from filthy words. Love not much talking. Reverence the Elders. Love inferiors for Christ's sake. Make peace with adversaries before the setting of the sun.

2. As for buffoonery, idle words, and words that move to laughter, we condemn and forbid them in all places, nor do we allow a disciple to open his mouth to give them utterance (Cap. 6).

3. When a Monk speaks, let him speak gently and without laughter, humbly, gravely, briefly, and discreetly. Let him not be clamorous in voice (Cap. 7, 11, Grad.).

4. Above all things take heed not to murmur by word or by sign on any occasion whatsoever (Cap. 34).

5. Let no one call another by his simple name; when a Senior passes by, let the Junior rise and give him place to sit; nor shall the Junior presume to sit with him unless his Senior bid him do so, in order to accomplish that which is written: "In honour preventing one another" (Cap. 63). With respect to asking a blessing from those who are passing by, an act which is mentioned in this chapter, that act is performed by uncovering the head and by an inclination which is made, not out of mere politeness, but with internal humility.

6. Let no one presume to relate to others that which he has either seen or heard outside the Monastery, especially if he has been living in the world, because from these conversations arise many evil consequences (Cap. 67).

7. Special care must be taken that on no occasion one Monk presume to uphold or defend another in the Monastery, even though they be near of kin. In no way whatsoever let any Monk presume to do this, because thence may arise exceeding great occasion of scandal (Cap. 69).

8. Lastly, that which is said in the seventy-second chapter concerning the good zeal which Monks ought to have, must be specially noticed and kept in constant remembrance.

“Let Monks,” says our holy Father, “exercise this zeal with most fervent love—that is to say, let them ‘in honour prevent one another.’ Let them patiently bear with one another’s infirmities, whether these infirmities are of body or of mind. Let them vie with one another in the virtue of obedience. Let no one follow that which he thinketh profitable to himself, but rather that which is profitable to another. Let them show to one another all brotherly charity with a chaste love. Let them fear God, love their Abbot with sincere and humble affection, and prefer nothing whatever to Christ.”

READING, COMPLINE, EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE, SLEEP.—I. Monks ought at all times to keep silence, but especially during the hours of the night (Cap. 42).

2. Let them all come together presently after supper, and let either the Conferences of the Fathers be read, or anything else that will edify the hearers (Cap. 42).

3. When all are assembled, let them say Compline, after which no one shall be permitted to speak, unless there be some necessary cause, such as the arrival of Guests, the command of the Abbot, etc. Yet, even in these cases, let their words be uttered with the greatest gravity and moderation (*Ibid.*).

4. With tears and sighs, let them, in prayer to God, daily confess their past sins, and strive to amend them for the time to come (Cap. 4, Instr. 58).

5. Let them sleep, each in a separate bed and receive, according to the appointment of the Abbot, bed-clothes befitting their condition. Let them sleep clothed, and girt with girdles or with cords (Cap. 22).

ON CHAPTER 22, FROM TURRECREMATA.—I. Never go to sleep in the state of mortal sin.

2. Always pray before going to sleep, that the mercy of God may watch over you; may drive far from the place in which you rest all the snares of the enemy; with loving kindness may protect you and safely guard you.

3. With the sign of the Cross, arm yourself against the temptations of the devil.

4. Go to sleep with your mind full of good thoughts.
5. Be content with a hard couch.
6. Sleep clothed in your habit.
7. Lie with the members of your body modestly composed.
8. Sleep quietly. Sobriety in food and custody of the senses contribute much to produce a light sleep.
9. Be not too much given up to sleep.
10. Be not sluggish in bed, but be ready speedily to rise for the night watches; to celebrate the divine praises; to study, to pray, and to meditate.

II. As often as a Monk awakes, he ought straightway, in Psalms, to give thanks to God, because it is God that watches over us when we sleep and guards us from the roaring lions that are ready to devour us.

VOWS: OBEDIENCE.—With respect to the vow of obedience, oftentimes read and reflect on the following passages and chapters:—

*In the Prologue:* “Return by the labour of obedience to Him from Whom thou didst depart by the sloth of disobedience. Therefore, are my words now addressed to thee,” etc. “Let us, therefore, now prepare our hearts and our bodies to fight under the holy obedience of His commands.”

*In the second chapter:* “Then, finally, death shall be inflicted as a just punishment on the sheep who, by their disobedience, refuse to correspond to their shepherd’s care.”

*In the third chapter:* “Let no one in the Monastery follow his own will. Let no one either within or without the Monastery presume insolently to contend with his Abbot.”

*In the fourth chapter:* “Be not a murmurer. Hate self-will. Obey in all things the commands of the Abbot, though he himself (which God forbid) should do just the opposite to that which he teaches.” Read the fifth chapter throughout.

*In the seventh chapter:* First degree: “The Scripture forbiddeth us to do our own will, saying: ‘Leave thy own will and desire.’” Read the second and fourth degrees of humility. Third degree: “For the love of God, submit yourself with all obedience to your Superior, thereby



imitating Our Lord, of Whom the Apostle saith: 'He was made obedient even unto death.'"

*In the forty-ninth chapter:* "Whatever is done without the permission of the Spiritual Father, shall be imputed to vain glory. All things, therefore, must be done with the approbation of the Abbot."

*In the sixty-seventh chapter:* "He who shall do anything, how trifling soever, without leave of the Abbot, is liable to the penalty prescribed by the Rule." Read the sixty-eighth chapter and in it mark well the final words, for, they contain a great deal: "Let the Brother know that it is for his good, and trusting in the assistance of God, let him obey through love of Him." It is because we do not sufficiently trust in God's assistance that we remain in a low degree of perfection; for, we measure all things by our own little reason; we think that everything is too grievous for us; that it will stand in our way; that it is impossible; and we do not, with our whole heart, trust in God.

CHASTITY.—*In the Prologue:* "Who casting out of his mind the malignant devil and all his suggestions, brings them to naught, and taking his thoughts while they are still little ones, dashes them against the rock Christ."

*In the fourth chapter:* "Not to covet. To chastise the body. Not to seek after delights. Presently, by the remembrance of Christ, to put away any evil thoughts that may enter our hearts, and to reveal them to our Spiritual Father. To love chastity."

*In the seventh chapter:* "Be mindful of all that God hath commanded," etc. Read, and attentively consider, this first degree of humility. Who is there that will not be filled with fear when he reflects on these words: "Death sitteth close to the entrance of delight." Frequently let them be the subject of your thoughts; and from the reflections which you make, conceive a great fear and you will not love the vices of the flesh. The various other virtues which are recommended in the pages of the Rule, lend their aid to help you to keep intact the angelic virtue of chastity. Among these virtues, obedience and humility hold the first

rank. No one that neglects these, ever attains to true purity of heart. Towards the end of the fifth chapter, we gave a very remarkable passage from the Fathers, concerning obedience. The same Fathers say of chastity: "Chastity is impossible, unless the foundations of humility are first laid in the heart."\* Two reasons are assigned for this conclusion: First, because true humility makes us have recourse to God to obtain continence and the gift of chastity, according to that text: "I knew that I could not be continent unless God gave it; I went to the Lord and besought Him."† Secondly, because humility teaches us not to glory in our chastity, or in our virginity, lest we become like those foolish Virgins, of whom St. Gregory says: "While seeking from men glory on account of their virginity, they neglected to have oil in their vessels, and consequently deserved to be excluded from the marriage of the heavenly Spouse."

POVERTY.—*In the seventh chapter.* Sixth degree: "Let the Monk be content with all that is meanest and poorest." Read the thirty-third chapter; for, in it is contained almost the whole substance of that which may be said concerning this one.

*In the thirty-fourth chapter:* "Let him who needeth less, give God thanks, and let him not be grieved; let him who needeth more, be humbled on account of his infirmity, and let him not be puffed up with conceit, by reason of the mercy which is shown to him." By these words you are told that whatever is given to you is not given as a something due to you, a something which you deserve; but, out of mere pity, just as an alms is given to the poor. Therefore, whatever is bestowed on you, must be by you received with sentiments of the greatest gratitude and with thanks to God your good Father and to His vicars who, with so great kindness, provide for your necessities. This act, as is but just, should be performed with all sincerity. If it is continued throughout life, it is productive of innumerable graces and favours. Therefore, it ought to be practised with the greatest assiduity. The fifty-fourth and fifty-fifth chapters

\* Cassian, *Instit.*, lib. vi., cap. xviii.

† *Wisd.* viii. 21.

should be read throughout. The fifty-seventh, from the words: "But if any of their work," etc.

*In the fifty-eighth chapter:* "If the Novice has any property, let him, before his profession, either bestow it on the poor, or, by a formal gift, hand it over to the Monastery, without any reserve for himself; because, for the future, he must know that he has not so much as power over his own body."

AMENDMENT OF MANNERS AND STABILITY.—Because in the form of profession express mention is made of these two important duties, you must dispose yourself to comply with them in the spirit in which you know that our holy Father would wish you to comply with them. St. Benedict introduced them into that solemn contract, in order thoroughly to eliminate from the minds of his disciples the vices which are opposed to stability and amendment of manners. These vices were strongly-marked features in the lives of the Sarabites and the Gyrovagi, of whom mention is made in the first chapter of the Rule. Hence, if you refrain from these vices, or from vices similar to them and exercise yourself in practising the contrary virtues, we have no doubt whatever but that you will satisfy your obligation in this respect. The vice of the Sarabites consisted in cleaving to the world by their wicked lives. The pleasure of their desires was to them a law; they lived without rule; and whatever they either liked or made choice of, that they would have to be holy; but what they liked not, that they considered to be unlawful. Therefore, if you desire to amend your manners, you must be completely averse from the ways of the world; you must entirely submit yourself to the sweet yoke of obedience, doing nothing through self-will, but acting in all things according to the spirit of the Rule. The Gyrovagi were always wandering about from place to place without having any fixed abode, being altogether given up to their own pleasures and to the enticements of gluttony.

You will avoid their vices by loving the solitude of your cell; by shunning curiosity and unnecessary conversation; by applying yourself to mortification of the senses, to self-



denial, and to abstinence. If you show yourself desirous of practising these virtues, you will doubtlessly, through the grace of God, be filled with the spirit of our holy Father St. Benedict; and consequently, you will obtain a far clearer and deeper insight into the Rule than you would be able to secure by close study and by laborious research; for, it is written: "A good understanding to all that do it."\*

But for a full and complete knowledge of those things which you will be obliged to observe after your profession, such, for instance, as the vows of Religion, have recourse to the instruction of your Master. Do not imagine that you are allowed to do everything that you either may see done by others, or may hear is done by them; yet do not pass judgment on any one in particular; do not think that you have done your duty when you have rightly learnt and clearly understood everything that pertains to it; for, in addition to this you must act during the time of the Novitiate; you must exercise yourself in doing good; and by frequently doing good, you must acquire good habits.

\* *Ps. cx. 10.*

## CHAPTER X

### WORDS ADDRESSED TO THE NOVICE

“ Behold the Law under which thou desirest to fight ; if thou canst observe it, enter ; if thou canst not, freely depart.”

By these words St. Benedict gives you to understand that throughout your whole life you must have a firm purpose of observing regular discipline. If you have not this purpose, it would be better for you to remain in the world ; for, to live in the Religious State without that purpose, will, at one and the same time, be detrimental to the Order and very perilous to your own soul. Attend to the words of that most enlightened mistress of the Spiritual Life, St. Theresa, who, when speaking on this subject, says : “ Oh, how great love would that man show to God and what an excellent service would he render to God, if, seeing that he is unable to go through the discipline which is usually observed in a Religious House, he would humbly acknowledge his inability, and return to the world before taking on himself the obligation of the vows ! By his departure he would afford others an opportunity of enjoying the quiet of Religious Life.”\* We do not require you to be already perfect ; but only that you should have a firm purpose, never, throughout the whole course of your life, to give over the pursuit of perfection ; and that you should at once begin to show in your conduct some signs of this pursuit, especially with respect to those virtues of which we have already spoken, when treating of truly seeking God, of eagerness for the “ Work of God,” for obedience, for humiliation, and for the

\* *De Via Perfect.*, cap. xiii.

observance of the Holy Rule. But if you perceive that you have neither the courage nor the strength to do that which is required of you, again we say, freely depart, lest others be vitiated by your example, and thus one diseased sheep should infect the whole flock. Moreover, take notice that our holy Father does not say: "Behold the law under which thou mayest rest, or mayest live an idle life; but under which thou desirest to fight." These words are to intimate to you that the life of man on earth is a warfare; and that his days are as the days of a hireling. Therefore, he who wishes to take part in this spiritual campaign, in such a way as to obtain the eternal reward, must be ready to endure all hardships for the sake of his Lord. He must be ready to be proved as gold is proved, by the file, the hammer, and the fire of the furnace, in order that he may deserve to win the diadem and the kingdom which His Leader has prepared for him.\* According to this Law you will be judged, to see whether your conduct has merited either glory or condemnation. The book of the Holy Rule will be opened. If your deeds be conformable with its enactments, you will receive a reward; if they be not, you will have your portion with the hypocrites. Weigh well all these truths, and then make that resolution which right reason shall dictate.

\* Smaragdus.



## CHAPTER XI

### TRIAL OF PATIENCE

“Let him be again tried in all patience.”

IN order that this trial may be fruitful and productive of that solid good and of that progress in perfection which it was intended by our holy Father to procure, we must, in the first place, clearly state what is meant by the word *trial*; and, in the second place, point out in what way you are to conduct yourself during the course of it; what you must do and what you must not do. By the word “trial” we are to understand a proving or probation in every kind of virtue. For, since virtue consists in doing that which is arduous or difficult, it must follow that patience is altogether necessary; for, through patience we acquire the habit of virtue, and then all difficulty is taken away. But, in a very special manner, it is of the virtues of humility and obedience that we must understand the word “trial”; for, as we have already remarked in a preceding chapter, it is in these virtues that the spirit of the Holy Rule consists. Therefore, in order that you may come forth from this trial, as gold comes from the furnace—purer and more resplendent, and not as lead comes, softened and melted by the fire—be careful to put in practice the following counsels:—

1. In the first place, weigh well the purpose for which God, through His representatives, employs these various methods of probation and for which they are ordered by the holy Fathers, to be employed.

These are: (1) To purge you of the evil habits which you may, perchance, have contracted while living in the world,

and of the other disorderly affections to which corrupt nature is so prone.

(2) By means of these trials, to exercise you in true and solid virtue; for, without some such probation, you would be lukewarm, cowardly, and imperfect throughout your whole life.

(3) In this way, to break the force of the devil's temptations. St. John Climacus relates that on his death-bed a certain Monk, who had been very much tried and exercised by the Fathers, said to those who were standing around: "I give thanks to the Lord, and to you, my Fathers, because you have so severely tried me, that the trial has wrought my salvation. For, up to this moment, owing to your endeavours, I have been free from the molestations of the devil." When fervent Novices reflect on these words, instead of shunning, they will seek trials, in order not to lose the advantages which flow from them.

2. Accept these trials with great internal affection, springing both from your love of God and from the motive with which you are inspired by the virtue in which you are tried, whether that virtue is humility or obedience, etc. Therefore, be not content with outwardly performing various acts of virtue, or with enduring the particular trials which are imposed on you. To these acts add that internal affection of heart, by which you offer, as a holocaust to God, your will, honour, convenience, and whole self, without making any reserve whatever.

3. Be not satisfied with being proved and tried by others, but try yourself, according to that text of the Apostle: "Try your own selves whether you are in faith (in humility, in obedience, in poverty, etc.). Prove ye yourselves."\* Again; "Exercise thyself unto godliness,"† in the various ways which we have pointed out to you during the course of this little work, by never neglecting any occasion of self-conquest and self-denial; by even seeking out these occasions; and by taking advantage of them, to practise virtue.

4. Consider that it is utterly unworthy of a Religious to

\* 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

† 1 Tim. iv. 7.

accept the trials and to perform the actions which those trials impose on him, because it is the custom, because it is usual that Novices should be exercised in this way, because if he refused to submit to them, he would be dismissed. Motives such as these are indications of a spirit most abject and vile. From anyone animated by such a spirit as this, we look in vain for any noble action done for the glory of God. May He, in His mercy, hinder men of this character from ever being a burthen to any Religious Order.



## CHAPTER XII

### FINAL INSTRUCTIONS

"If he shall then promise, after due deliberation, to keep and observe all things commanded him, let him be received into the Community, knowing that he is from that time forward under the law of the Rule, so that he can neither leave the Monastery, nor shake off the yoke of the Rule which, after so long a deliberation, he might either have accepted or refused."—*Reg.*, cap. lviii.

WITH the above-cited words, our holy Father completes his instructions about the Novices; for, the clauses which immediately follow treat of the actual profession. With respect to this profession, you have three things to do, in order duly to bring your year of probation to a close. First, before your profession, you must deliberate. Secondly, you must promise to keep and to observe all things that are commanded you. Thirdly, you must clearly understand that after your reception and profession, you are not allowed to leave the Monastery, or to shake off the yoke of the Rule. Therefore, deliberate as it were anew, concerning this State of life, of which you have had experience during the course of the year of probation, and of which you are consequently able to form a better judgment than you could possibly have formed, while you were living in the world. The matter of this deliberation may be thus brought before your mind:

1. Do I altogether freely embrace this State, without fear, without compulsion, without regard for parents and for relatives; without the dread of that confusion which would fall on me if I were to return to the world?

2. Have I come to Religious Life, and do I wish to persevere in it, through a sincere desire of truly seeking God? Do I, in this State, and in accordance with those principles which have already been given concerning truly seeking God, correct any faults that I may have committed?

3. Am I either afflicted with any secret disease, or is there in me any other impediment in consequence of which I am unable validly and licitly to make my profession? If, after profession, any substantial defect be discovered, my profession being null and void, will in no way be of any avail to keep me in the Religious State; and, if I have maliciously and deceitfully concealed that defect, I have incurred the guilt of a grievous sin.

4. Have I the strength and the resolution to bear the burthen of Monastic Life, of the vows, and of the Holy Rule; and have I a sufficient knowledge with respect to these various points? If I doubt about anything, or if I am ignorant of anything, I am bound to seek adequate instruction thereon, and then to deliberate as to what I am to do, and lastly, to resolve to do it.

In the presence of God Who is the searcher of hearts, I must weigh well each of these matters. I must call to my aid that most truthful counsellor, death; for it is written: "O death, thy judgment is good!"\* Take counsel with your Spiritual Father, and, having with the utmost candour explained everything to him, determine on the course which you will pursue.

With respect to the second point, namely: "That he will keep and observe everything commanded him," you must bear in mind that this promise has not the force of a vow, because it is made *before* your reception and profession; but, as Turrecremata remarks: "It is a sure and manifest indication of your willingness to keep those counsels and precepts which are in the Rule, and to observe those which are given to you by your Superiors." Take notice that you ought to be ready to observe not only those things which are explicitly contained in the Rule, but those which are imposed by Superiors, provided only that they are not against, or beyond, or below the Rule; for, this inference may be drawn from the words which are employed by our holy Father. Hence, the Abbot must be obeyed whenever he wishes to take away an abuse, or, as it is called by others, a custom opposed to regular discipline, although that custom

\* *Ecclus.* xli. 3.

is not, in express terms, prohibited by our holy Father in his Rule.

In order that the promise, which we have already mentioned, may be more firm and voluntary, it ought to follow after due deliberation. This promise is all the more necessary, from the fact that he who is either unable or unwilling, with all sincerity to make it, is not fit to lead the Religious Life. Moreover, a promise of this kind, which is not made with sincerity, is exceedingly hateful to God Who reads the secrets of the heart. It is detestable in His eyes, even though it has not yet the binding power of a vow; "for, an unfaithful and foolish promise displeaseth Him."\*

Finally, our holy Father thus concludes: "Knowing that he is from that time forward under the Law of the Rule,"—that is to say, from the day of his profession,—“so that he can neither leave the Monastery,”—to return to the world or to go to a less severe Order,—“nor shake off the yoke of the Rule,”—by various transgressions,—“which yoke, after so long a deliberation, he might either have accepted or refused.” Although these words have reference to the time which follows profession, yet they are placed before you by St. Benedict, in order that while you are still free to accept or to refuse the yoke, you may weigh well what you are about. If you choose to make your profession, and voluntarily to take on your shoulders the yoke of the Rule, strongly arm yourself against the frauds and temptations, by which the devil endeavours, in manifold and most crafty ways, to lead Religious openly to apostatise, or, under various pretexts, to seek to be dispensed from their vows, to the great detriment of the Monastery, of the Order, and of even the Religious State. Or again, if it does not come to such an evil pass as this, he strives to induce them, under pretext of seeking greater perfection and sanctity, to procure their translation to another Order; but, if he cannot bring about this, he causes them, little by little, to lose their first fervour and in many ways to offend against the Holy Rule. We think that this was the idea in the mind of our holy

\* *Ecclus.* v. 3.



Father, when he wrote the words which we have quoted ; for, he was solely intent on the salvation of his children.

But how will the Religious escape being entangled in these snares? By performing during the time of the Novitiate and after profession, by not ceasing to perform those various pious practices which have not been invented, but which we have taken from the words of our holy Law-giver. Instead of failing to accomplish them, daily endeavour, with greater perfection, to perform them, and you will be able to say with the Royal Psalmist: "The snare is broken, and we are delivered."\* Let fear fill the heart of the slothful Novice and of the slothful Religious, who do not take any pains to obey our holy Father's counsels and to carry out his intentions.

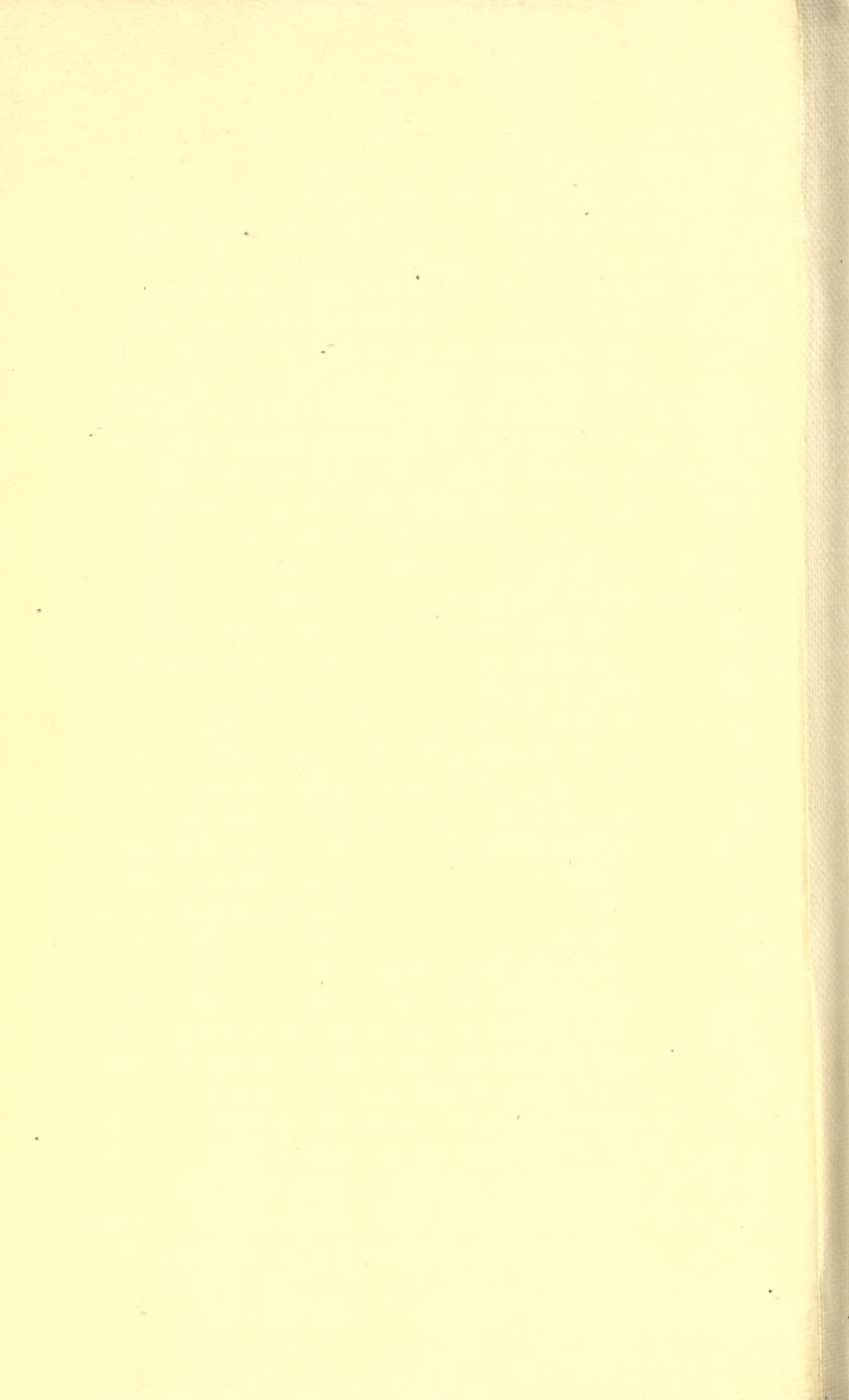
Very good reason to be afraid has that Novice who goes through the year of probation in a lukewarm manner, and in a kind of forced observance of external duties. He deludes others, but chiefly himself; for, after his profession, he does not strive to become better, or to make progress in perfection. Also, let that Religious be full of fear, who, although he has not gone through the Novitiate in a slipshod, careless fashion, yet, after his profession, has sensibly fallen away from his first fervour, just as if St. Benedict had legislated for the time of the Novitiate only, and as if he had not had the design of spurring on his children, who have made a good beginning in the year of trial, to advance in perfection till the last step of this their mortal pilgrimage! Finally, let him be filled with dread and fear, who, puffed up with the spirit of pride, presumes to despise these and similar instructions, as being too simple and elementary: "Behold I come against thee, O proud one! saith the Lord, the God of hosts; for thy day is come, the time of thy visitation. And the proud one shall fall, he shall fall down, and there shall be none to lift him up."† It is written: "God hath abolished the memory of the proud, and hath preserved the memory of them that are humble in mind."‡

\* Ps. cxxiii. 7.

† Jerem. i. 31, 32.

‡ Ecclus. x. 21.







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